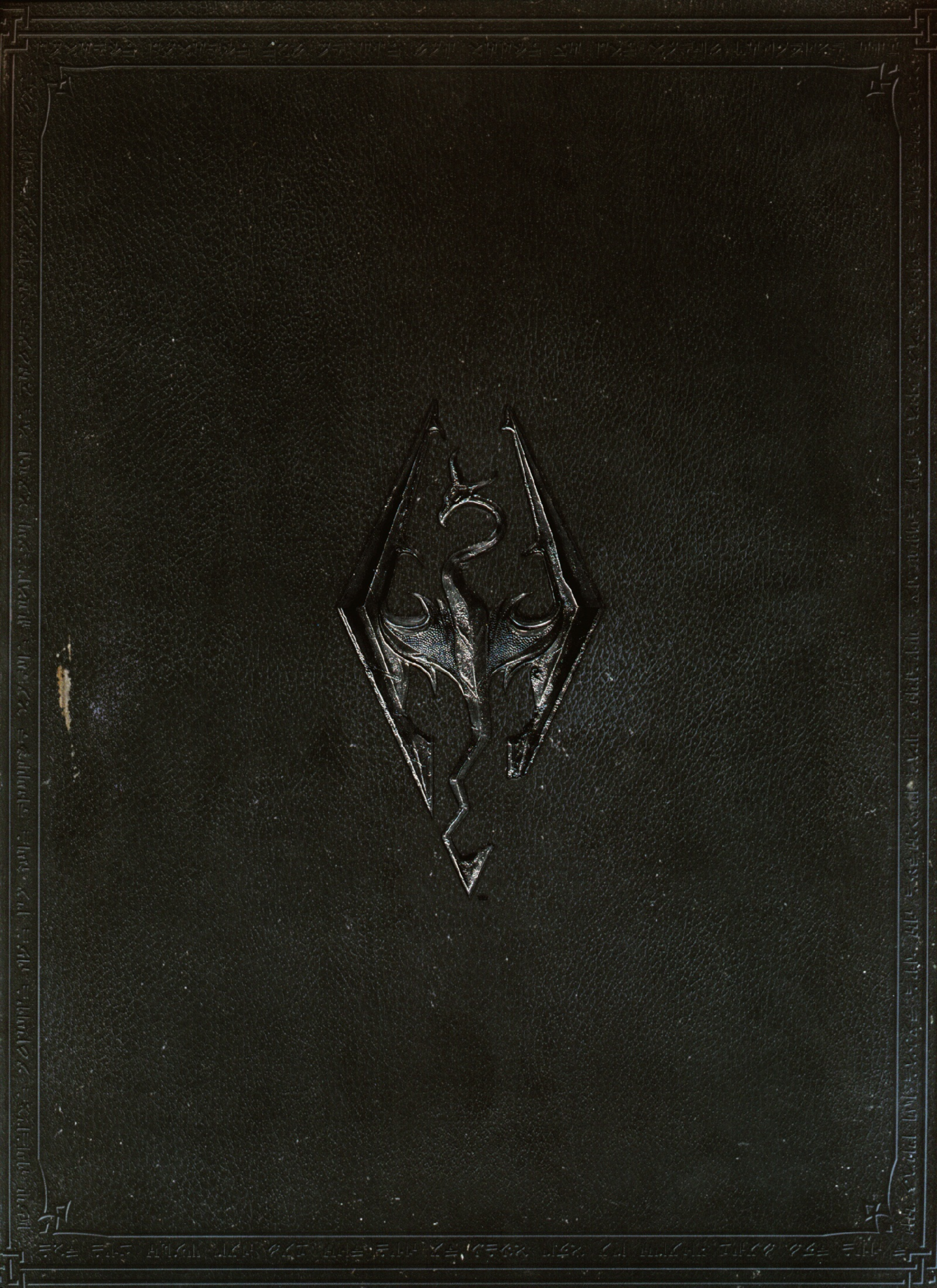


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TM

FOREWORD

When we start designing any of our games, we always start with the feel of the world. Despite our stories and character systems, the worlds in our games are the main characters. It's the world that tells the story, it's the world that invites you to explore, and it's the world that rewards you. It's our belief that when you first play an Elder Scrolls game, it has to take you to another world. It's this mix of high technology and artistry that make video games the greatest form of entertainment on earth; to play and to create.

At Bethesda Game Studios we have an amazing team of artists, designers, programmers, and producers. It takes all of us to put the game together, and to make even the smallest ideas believable. And that's what we strive for: to make the game, despite it being fantasy, completely believable for what it is. To make you think "this is all really happening," or "this could have happened." We obsess over the details, large and small. The first piece of game art, created by Lead Artist Matt Carofano, was a simple stone wall aged to perfection.



First Skyrim screenshot - 2008

This book celebrates our art team, the group that makes that world beautiful and inviting. The art in the game is the final results of their efforts. With this book, we wanted to make sure we showed its genesis. Ninety percent of what you see in this book is concept art created by two men, Adam Adamowicz and Ray Lederer. They're two of the finest, and most entertaining, people I've had the fortune to work with. Every day for three years these two guys created images that inspired the entire team. We hope they inspire you just as much.

Todd Howard
Game Director, Skyrim



Ray Lederer and Adam Adamowicz

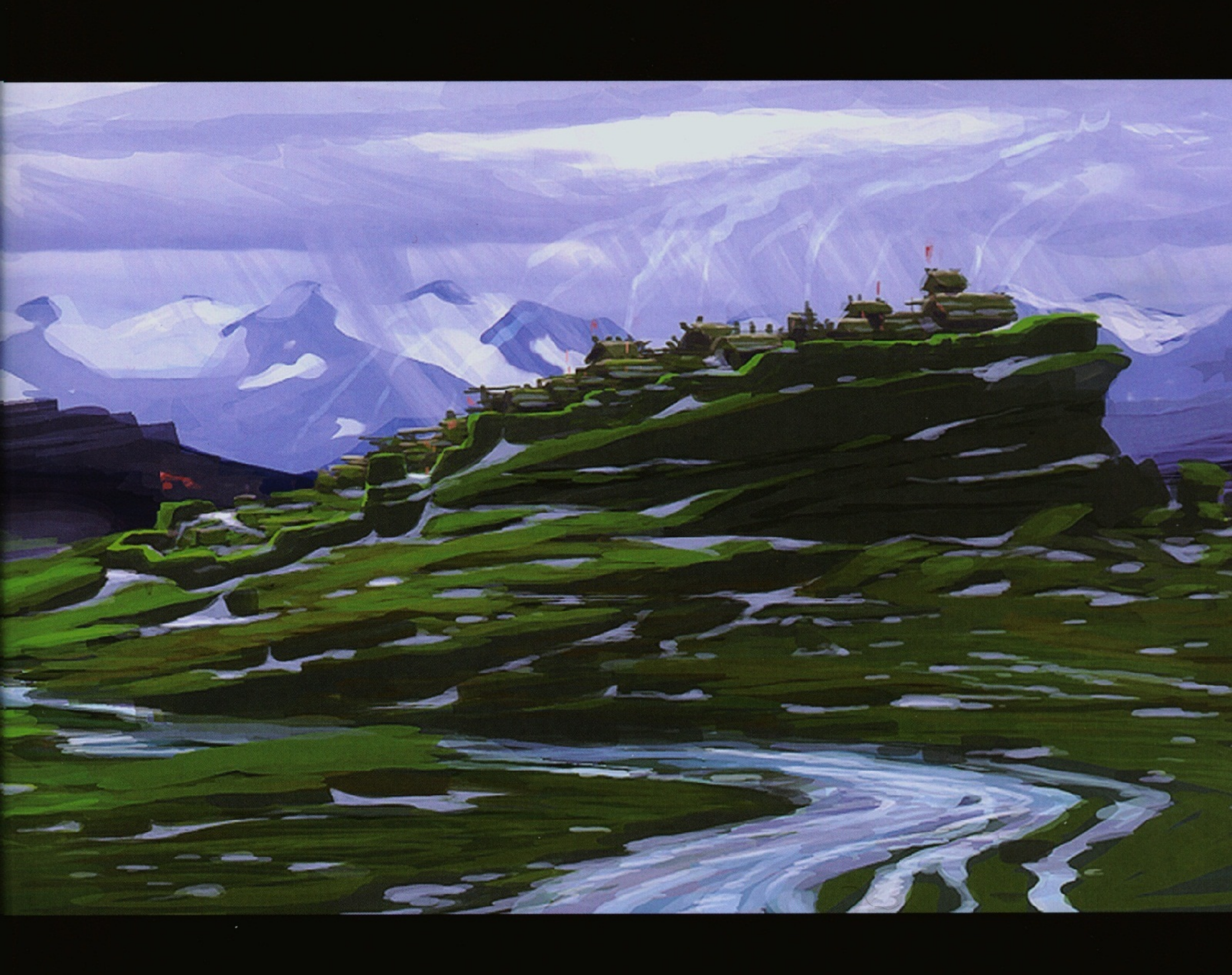

DEAD
Titleist
OBLIVION



THE TEAM

While this book focuses on the art of Skyrim, the game was created by a team of nearly 100 people of different disciplines.





WORLD





Riften

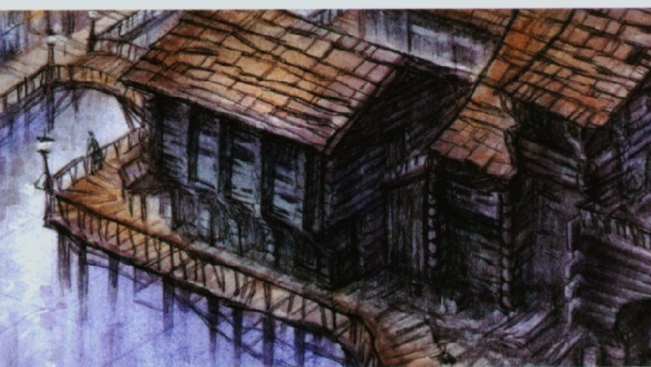


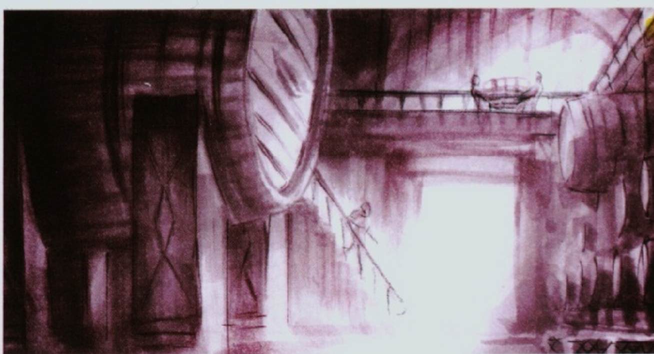
Riften

Riften, situated on the eastern shore of Lake Honrich and amid the beauty of the Rift, is home to the Thieves Guild. This design creates a strong contrast between the surrounding environment and the seedy Ratway beneath the city.












RIFTEN:
CASTLES & STRUCTURE
IDEAS.




RIVERWOOD TRADER



Riverwood



Riverwood

Riverwood was the prototype for the towns in the game. It was the first area built to completion in Skyrim.





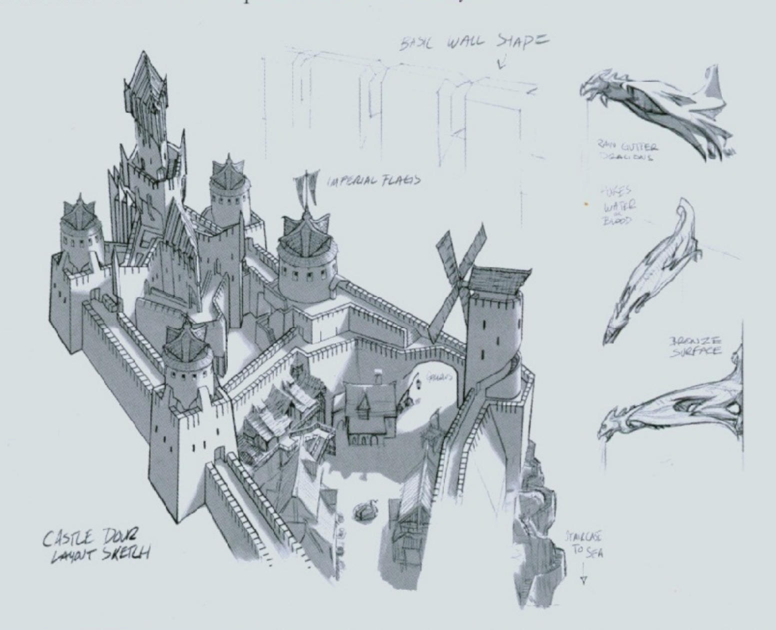




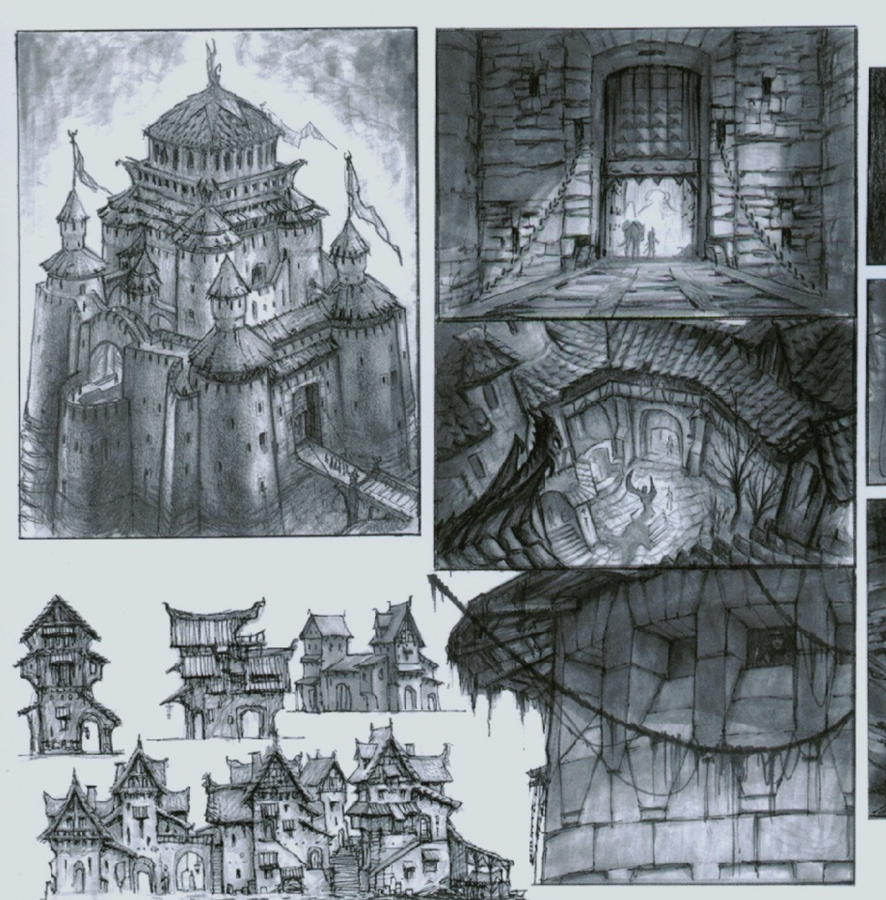
Solitude

Solitude

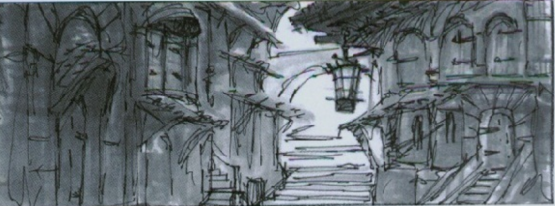
Solitude was originally designed as the seat of the Imperials in the province of Skyrim. As a result, the architecture was created to reflect the Imperial style from past Elder Scrolls games. The idea of building it on a land bridge came early in production and remained one of the most unique features of this city.









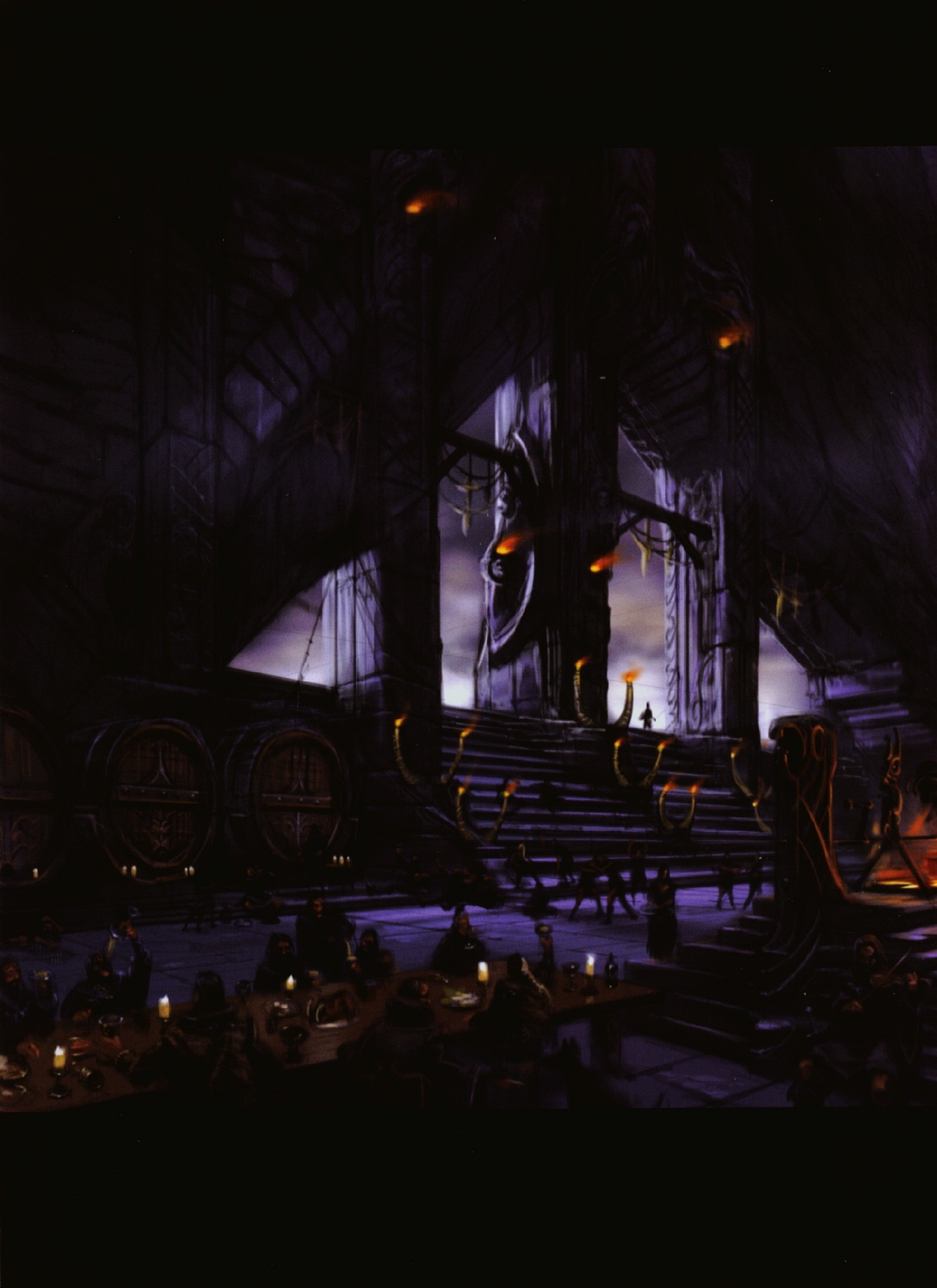


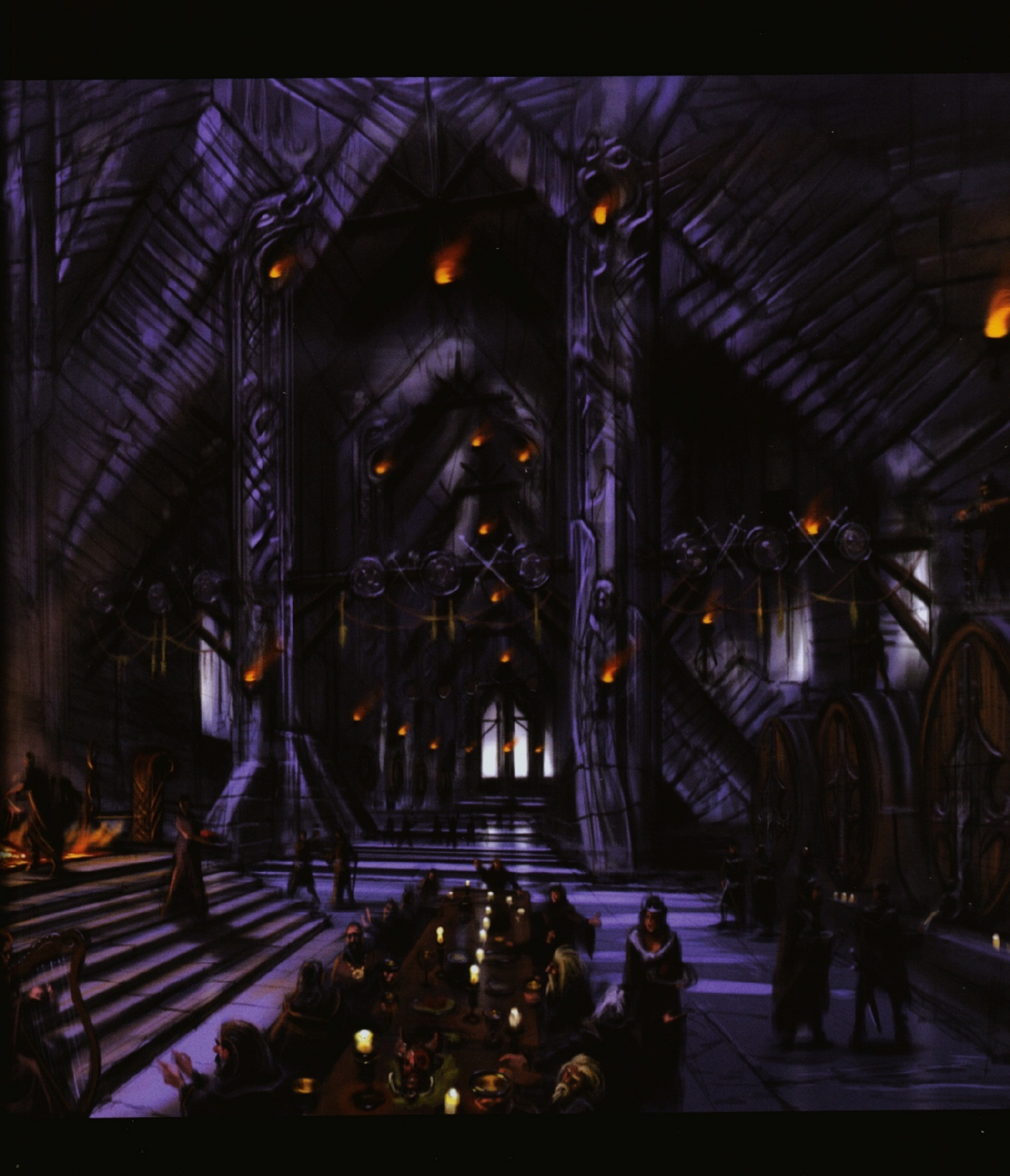










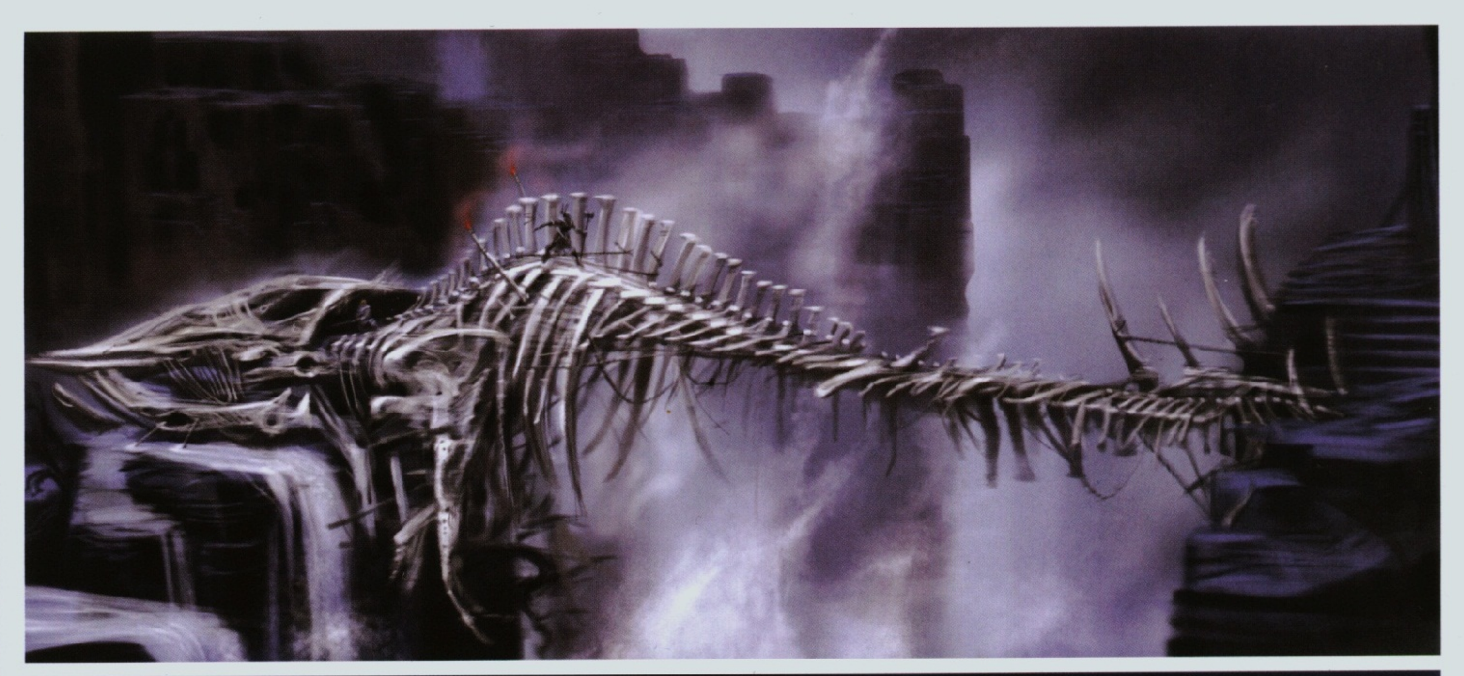


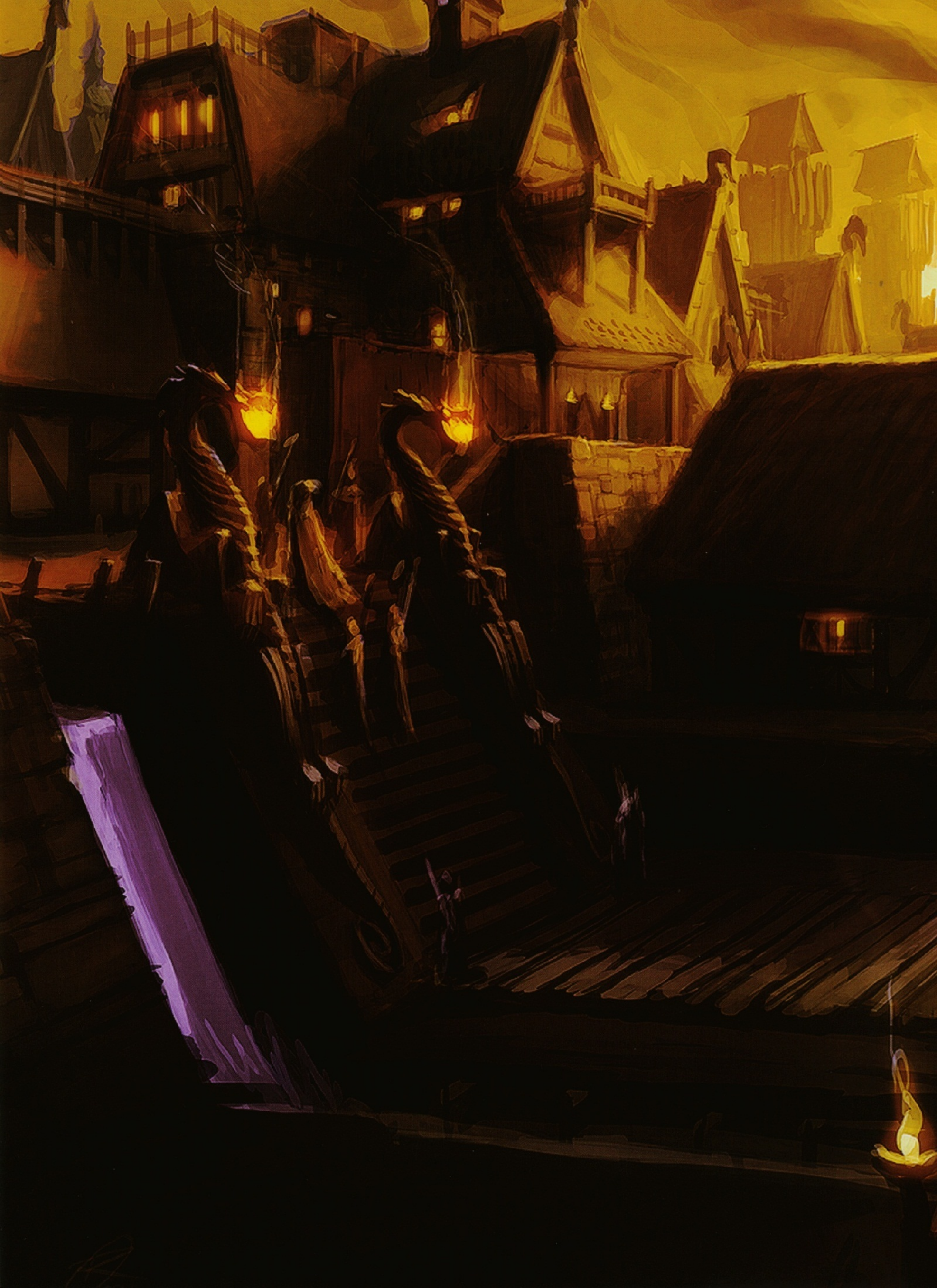
Sovngarde

Sovngarde

Sovngarde is the Skyrim equivalent of Valhalla. We created an idealized version of an ancient Nordic mead hall set in a dramatic northern valley to receive warriors when they die.



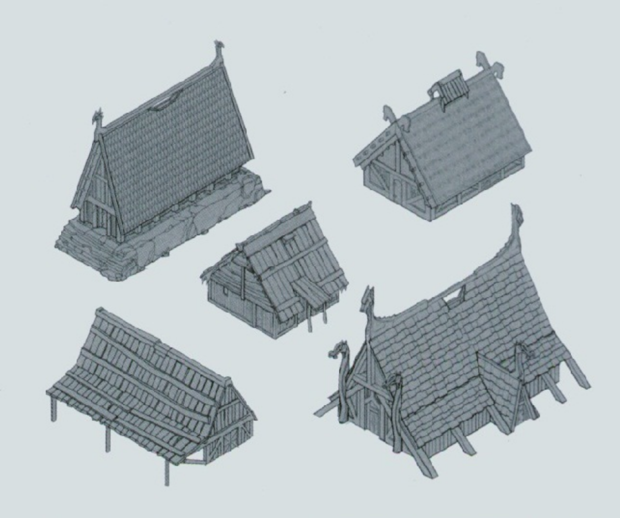






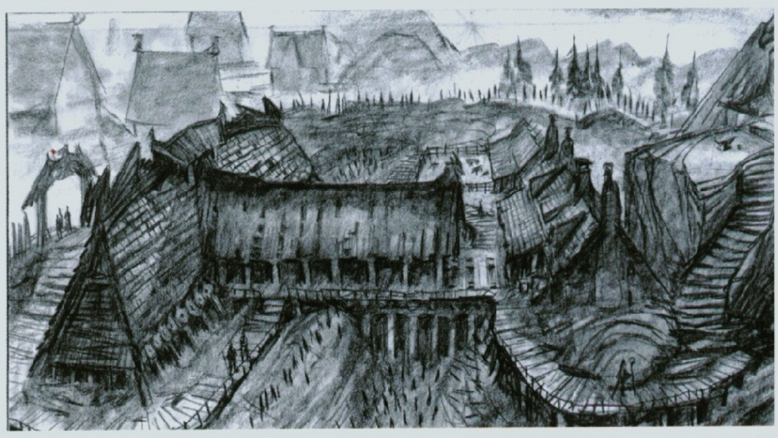
Whiterun


Whiterun - The Bannered Mare
The Bannered Mare
The Bannered Mare
Rooms
Luxury Suite
Common Area
Tavern
Main Hall
Inn Keepers Suite
Kitchen

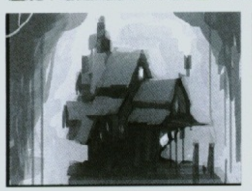














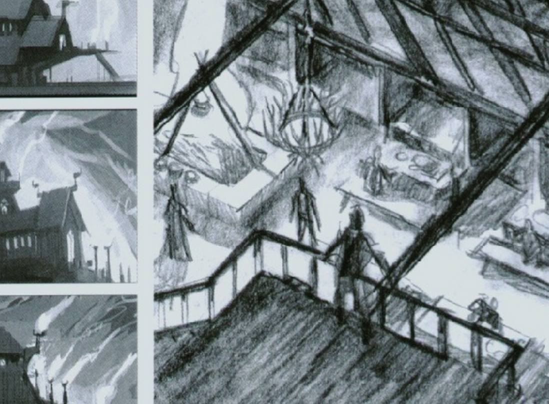




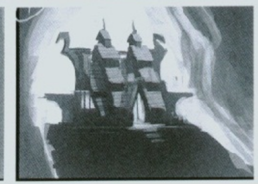










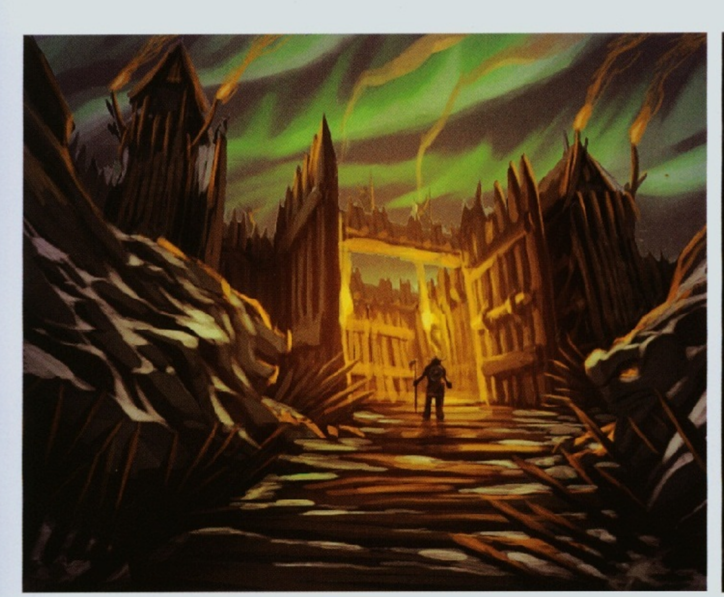






Whiterun

Built on a huge rock outcropping in the middle of the tundra, Whiterun is a more classic example of Nordic architecture. The early designs envisioned a crystalline throne left in its raw form after the ground was broken to build the Jarl's castle. It wound up being too specialized an object to justify building, considering the massive size of the game.



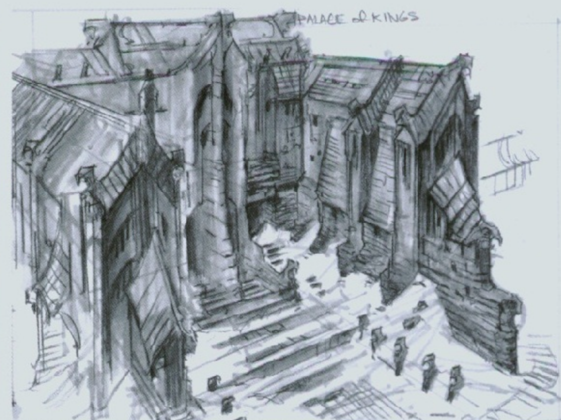




Windhelm

Windhelm sits on the northern bank of the White River, an imposing view of massive stone walls. It is the oldest city in Skyrim, built over a span of centuries on top of an ancient Nord fortress from the earliest days of Skyrim. It is home to the Stormcloaks, and the only city that thrives in the snow and ice of the coldest region.

















WINDHELM CASTLE: 9/16 A
Barracks and Donjon at base,
Wizard's Tower sitting on top
next to Main Keep on the
Right.



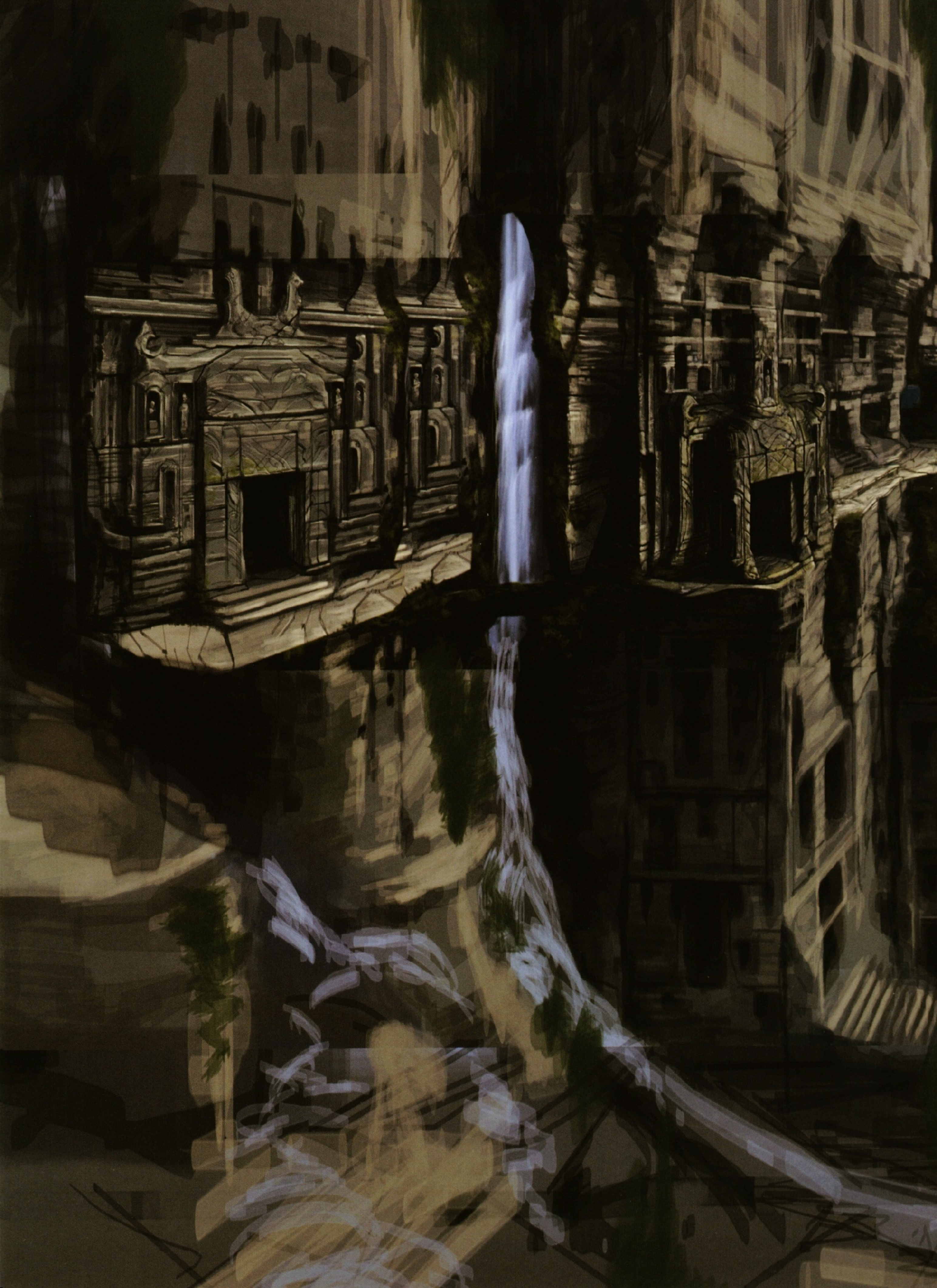


High Hrothgar

High Hrothgar

High Hrothgar is home to the monastic order of the Greybeards, who are devoted followers of the Way of the Voice. The overall shape is reminiscent of a dragon spine and stretches out as a barrier to keep travelers from reaching the summit.



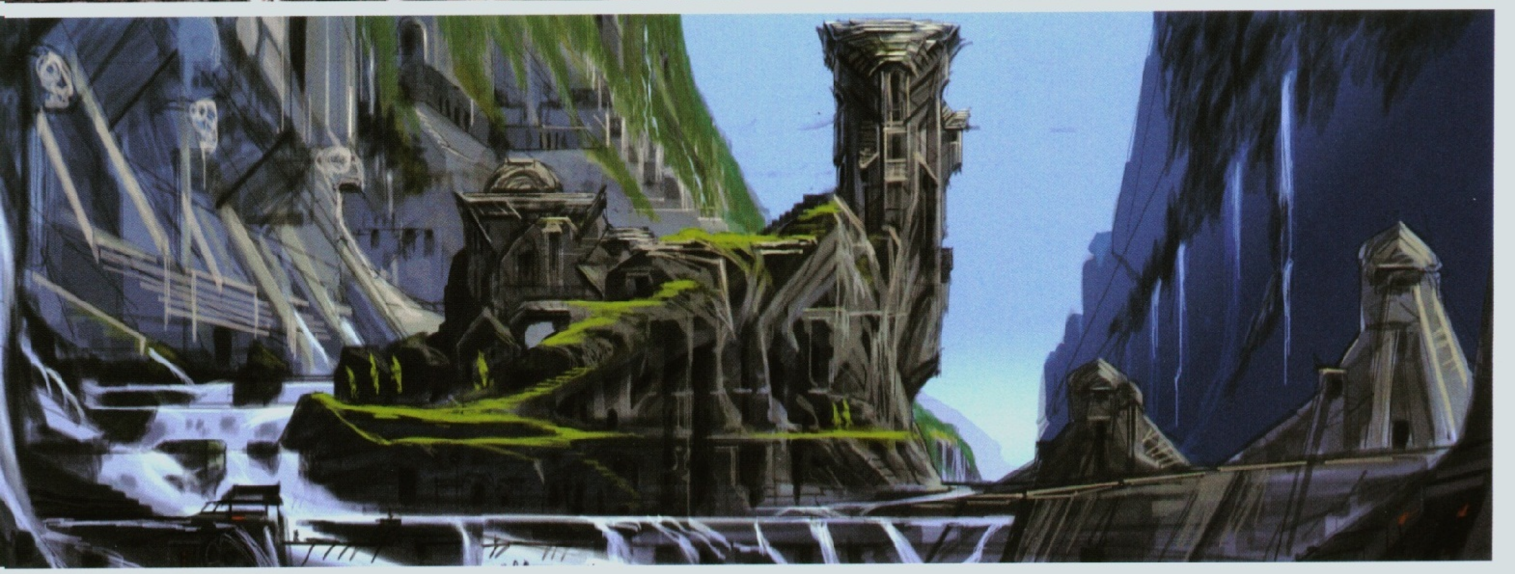


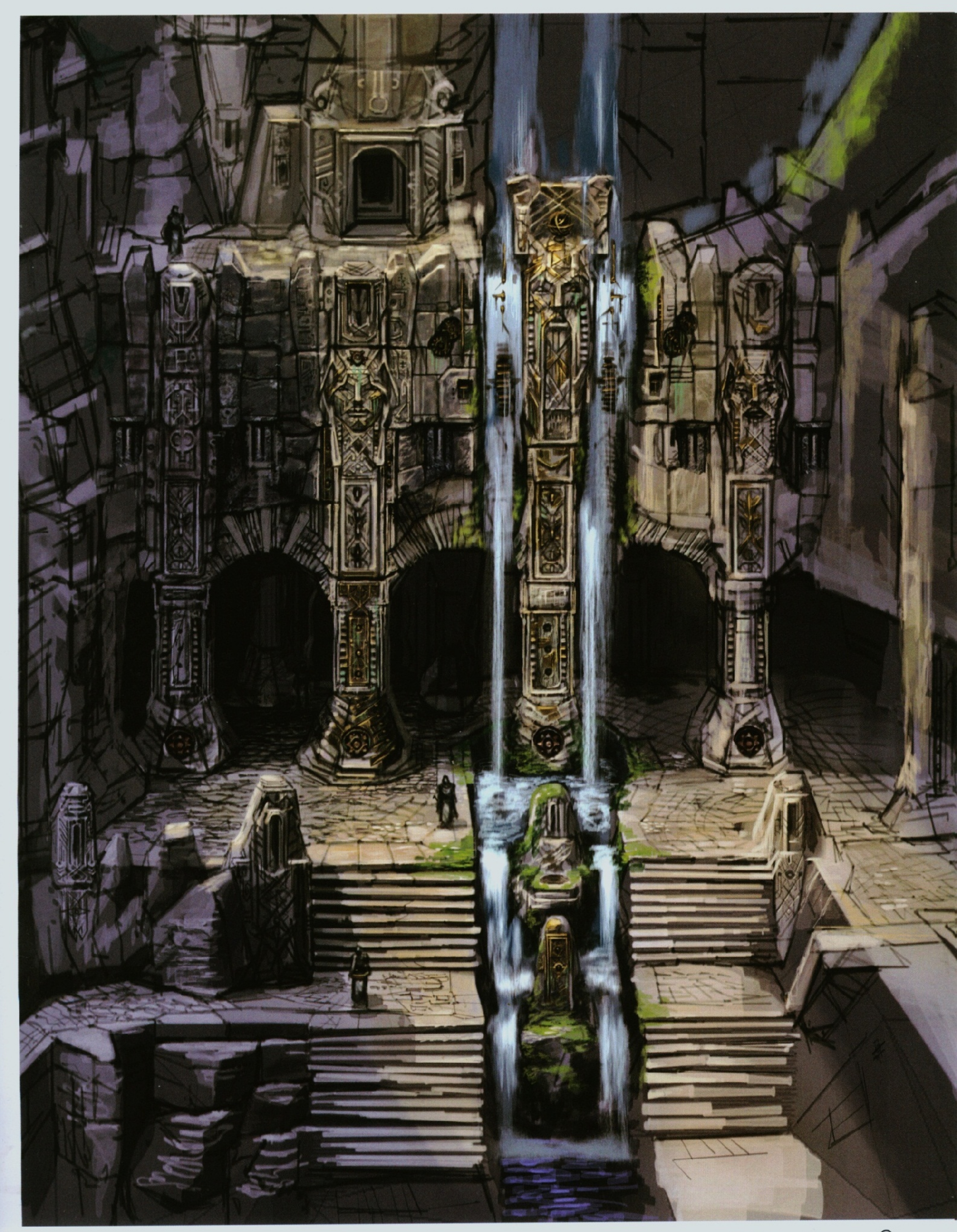


Markarth

CASTLE
D-Tower
DiBella
Rich Mansions
Lower


TERRAIN - MARKATH



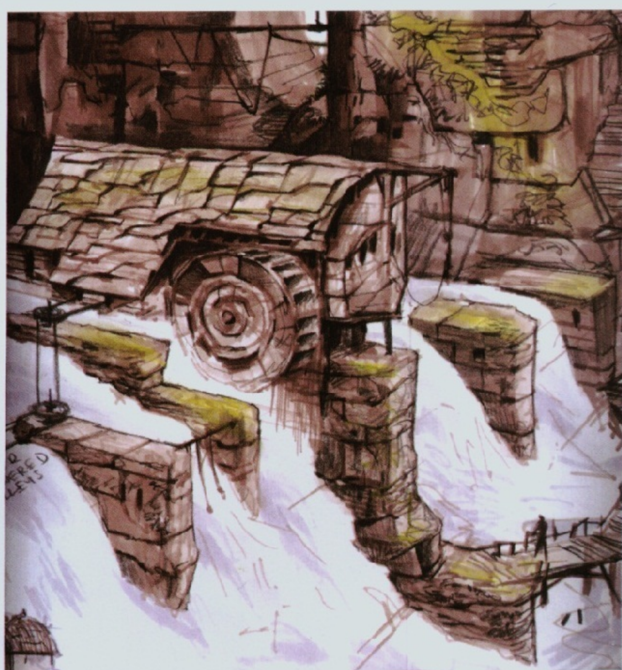




Markarth

Markarth is an ancient Dwemer city built into the towering cliffs of the Reach's mountain range. The design for the city was focused on extreme verticality, allowing for striking panoramic views from many different levels while still making it easy to navigate.











Nordic Ruins





Nordic Ruins



Nordic Ruins

The Nordic Ruins are deliberately primitive in their construction. Rough hewn stone, large wooden posts and archaic carvings suggest a primitive, but deeply spiritual culture. The overgrowth and rubble speak to the age of the ruins, and the architectural shapes suggest ribcages, femurs, and repeating vertebrae of dragons.






Vent/smoke
or arrows
window
Whalebone
Clan Ley Stone



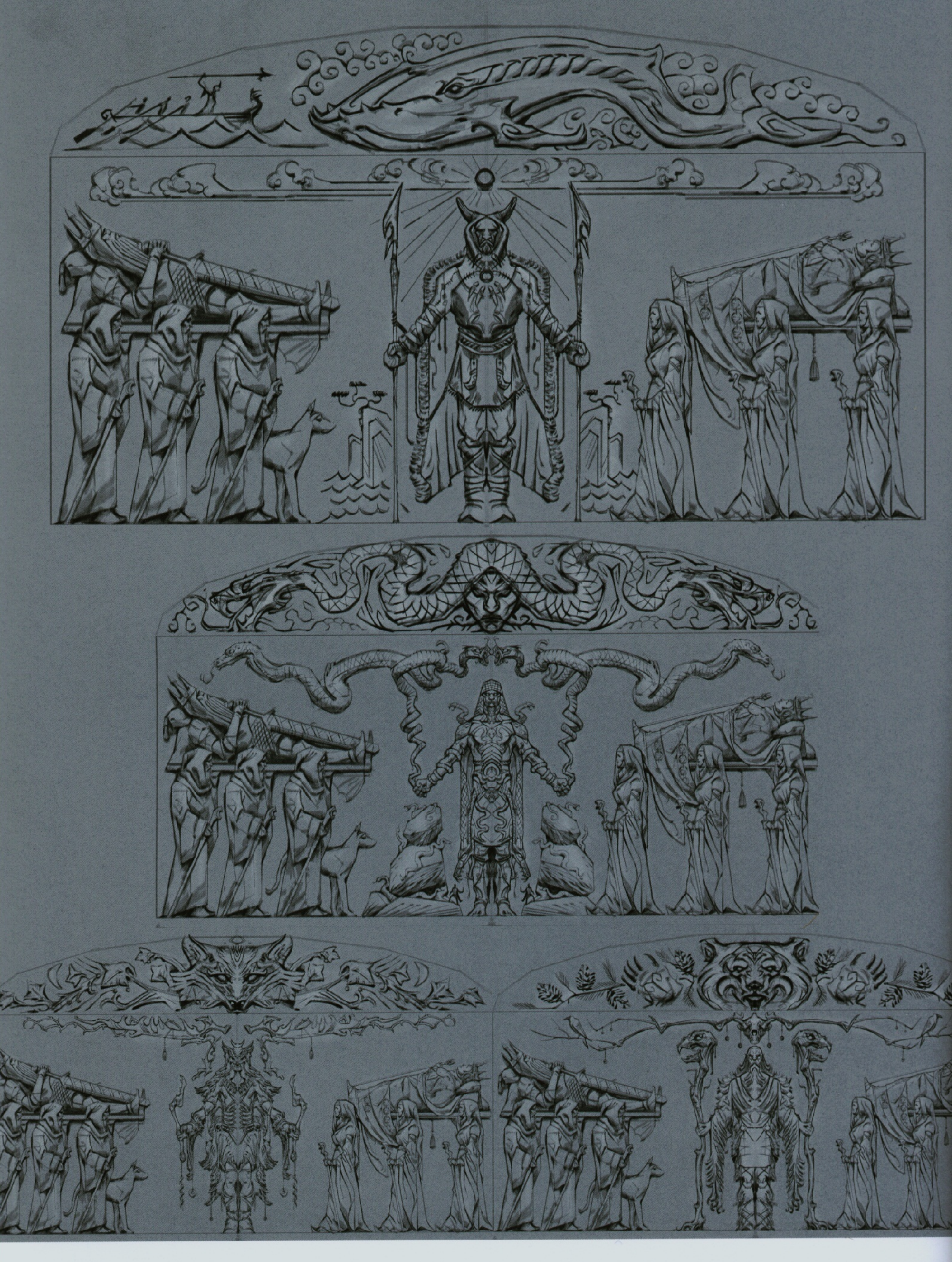



DRAUGR LAUNCHERS
MASONRY FALL DOW
shallow floor graves
1 piece slab basin -> like a PEZ
Tooth effect
Rope end
floor
DRAGON GRAVEYARD - GUARDED BY WILD REACHMEN
W/UNDEAD DRAUGR SURPRISE INSIDE
top sealed w lead.
Put one in someone's house for fun
Rune Petro-glyph areas
CROSS SECTION



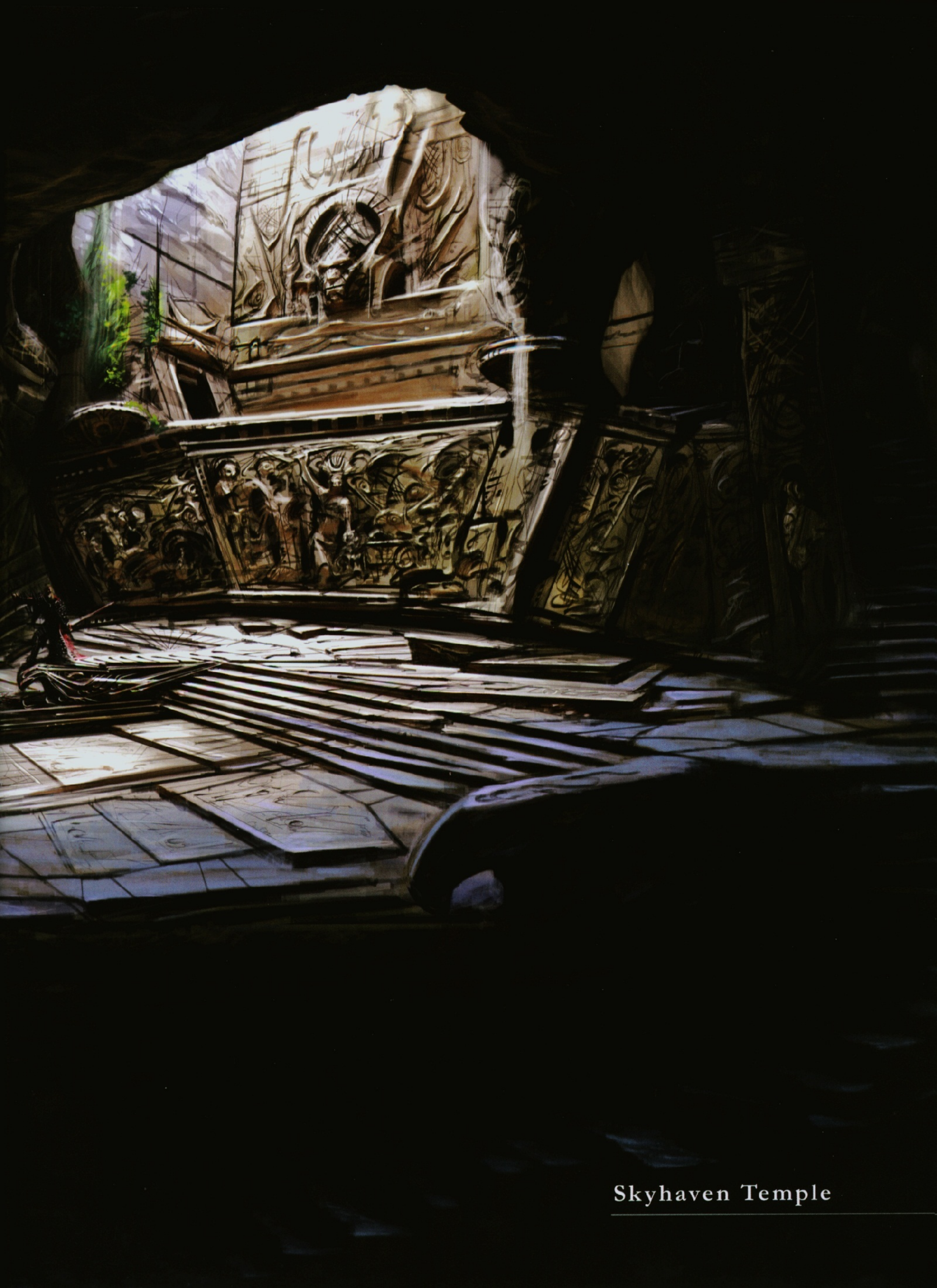


Hall of Stories








Skyhaven Temple

Skyhaven Temple

This hidden temple is the only example of Akiviri architecture in the Skyrim province. The entire structure was built on top of a cliff in the Reach in order to obscure its location.





entrance w/ hanging swords

skylight

skylight

Reman's Wall

larder

wilderne

fountain/shrine

entrance/exit

hearth

sleeping alcove

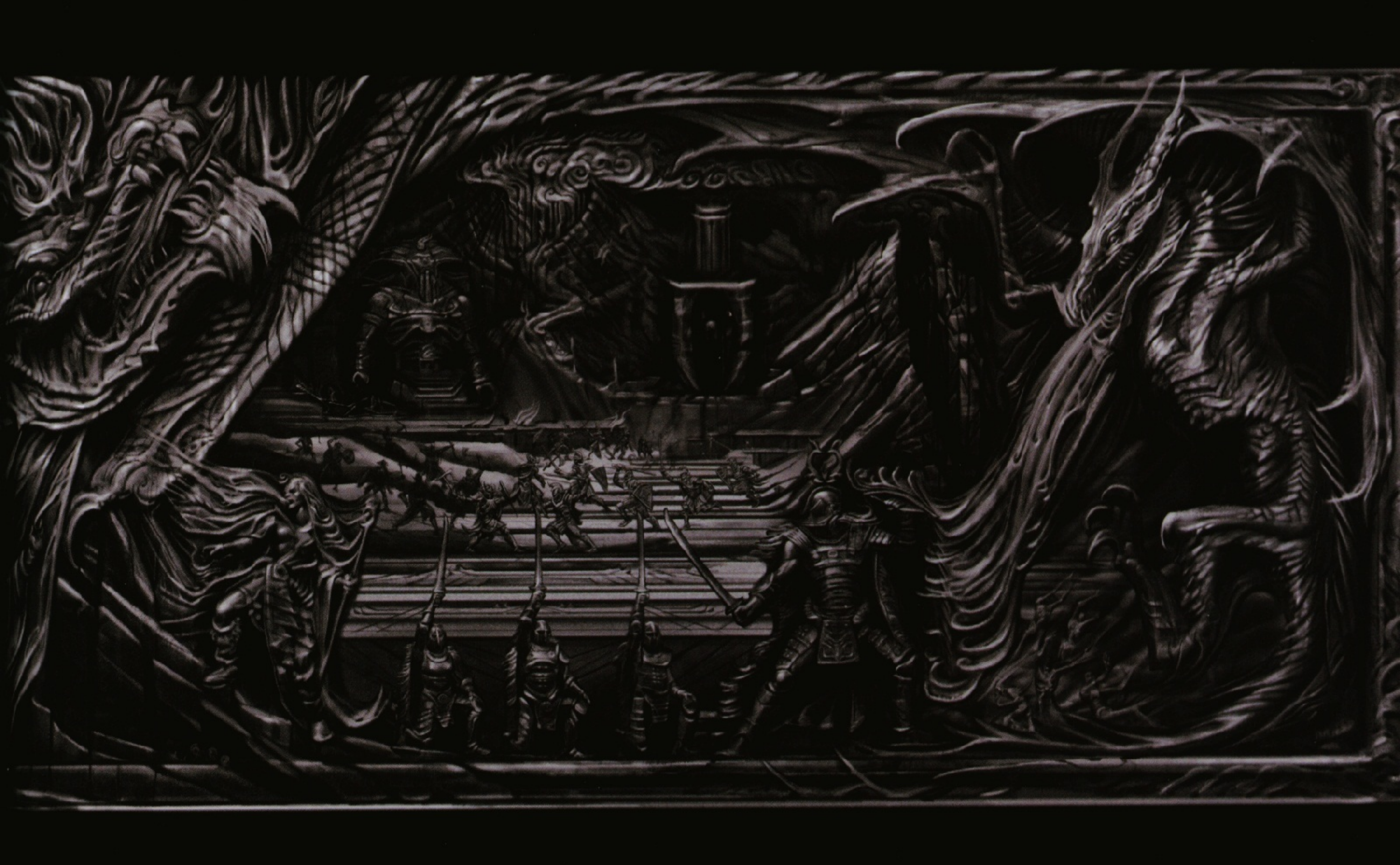
possible devic

original sketch

basic column

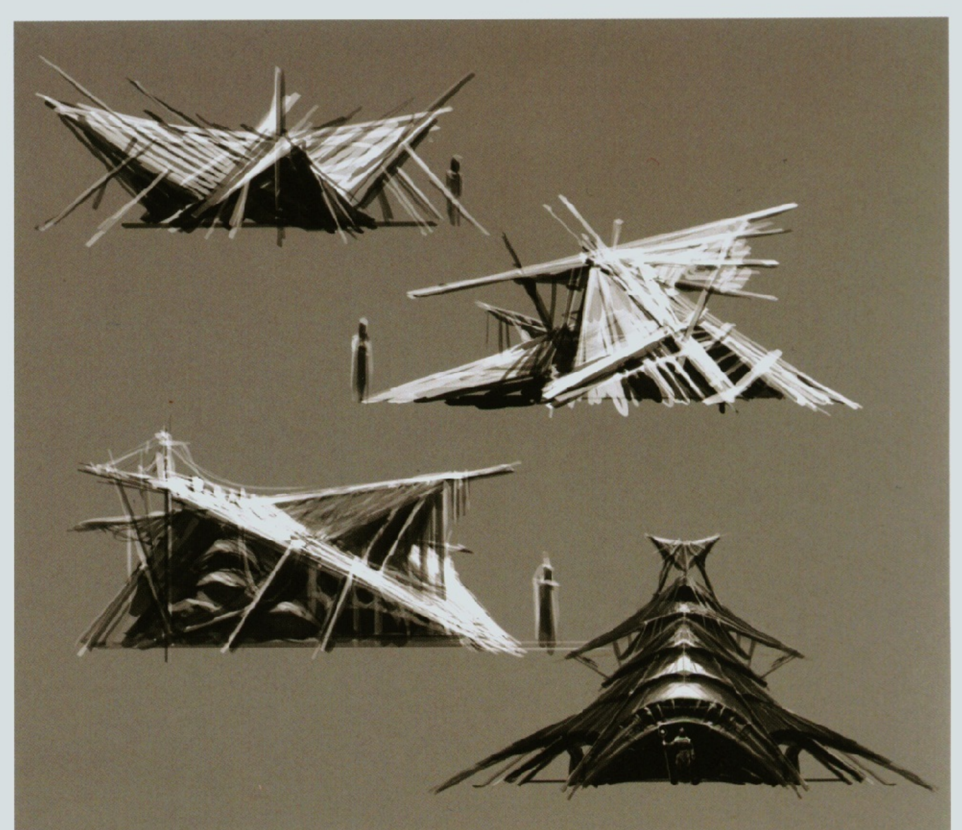
squared, pitted edge





Alduin's Wall

Alduin's Wall is a physical representation of the main story of Skyrim. It depicts Alduin in the past destroying the world, a group of heroes banding together to banish him, and then the prophesized Dovahkiin who will stand against him. This piece of art plays a pivotal role in the main quest.



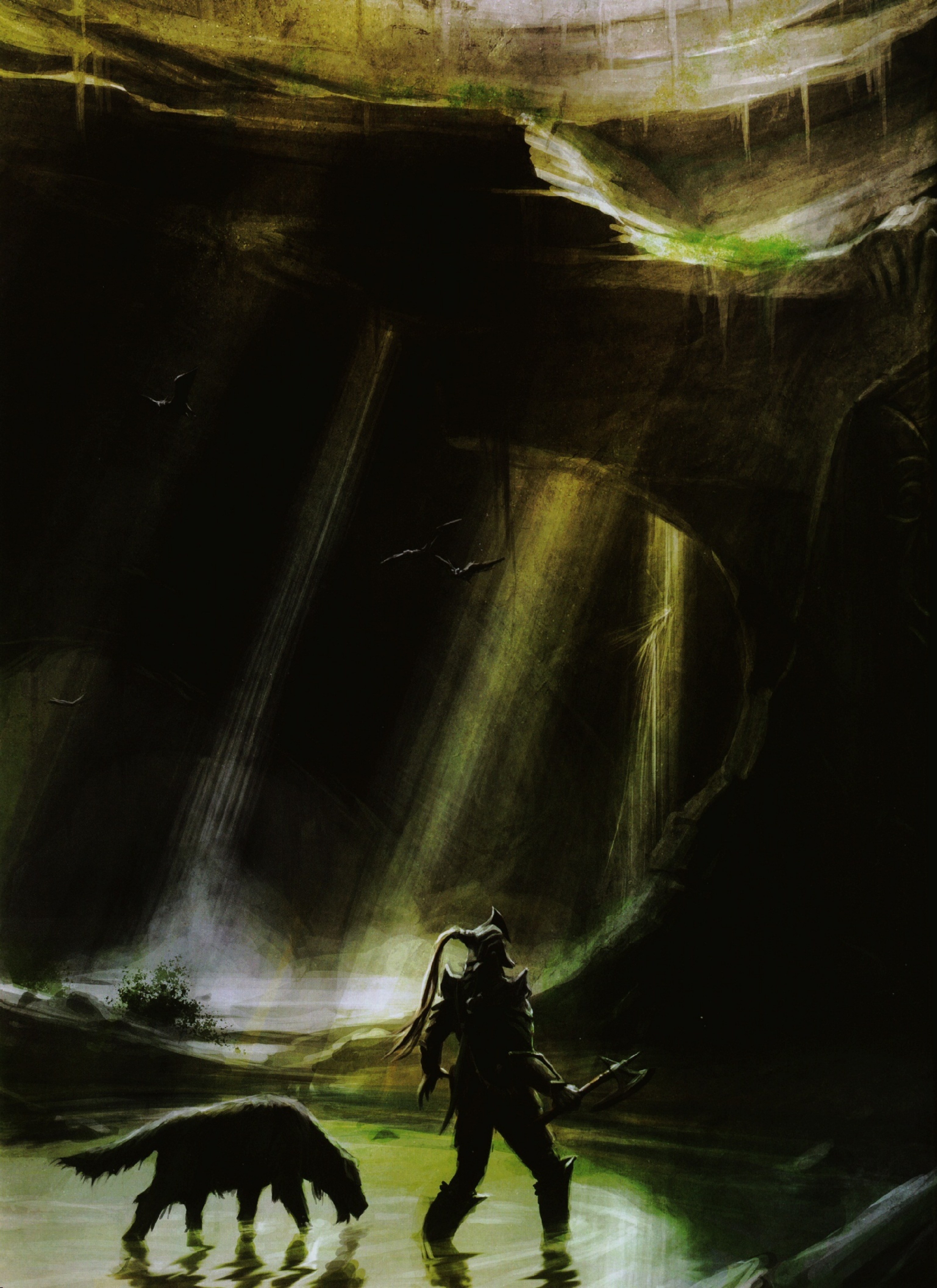
Forsworn

The theme of Forsworn is the corruption of nature. This can be seen through their primitive dwellings which suggest a nomadic and ritualized culture.

Orc Longhouse

We gave the Orcs a more Eastern style of architecture to establish their own distinct culture, while still maintaining a tribal quality to them. These two themes come together in the final structure's large teepee-like appearance which shields the small encampments.







STATUES



Statues

Statues are the main representation of religion in the game. They are divided into two groups: the Daedra, who are the more sinister gods, and the Aedra, who are more benevolent. Statues are an example of the "epic reality" in Skyrim due to their scale and dramatic placement in the world.



Vaermina



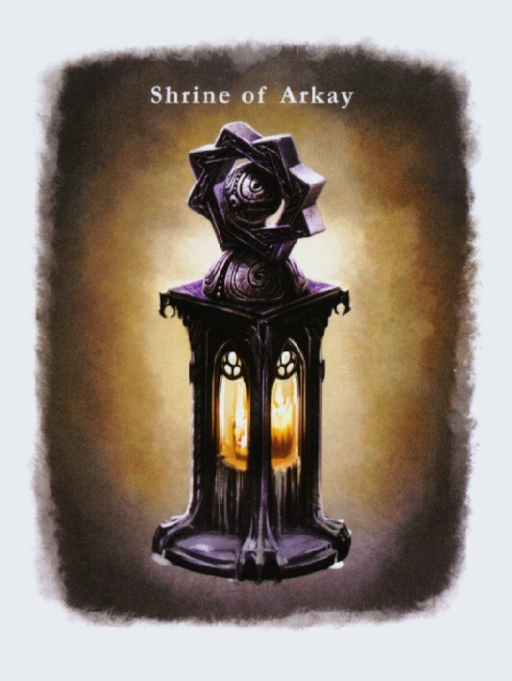
Jurgen Windcaller's Tomb

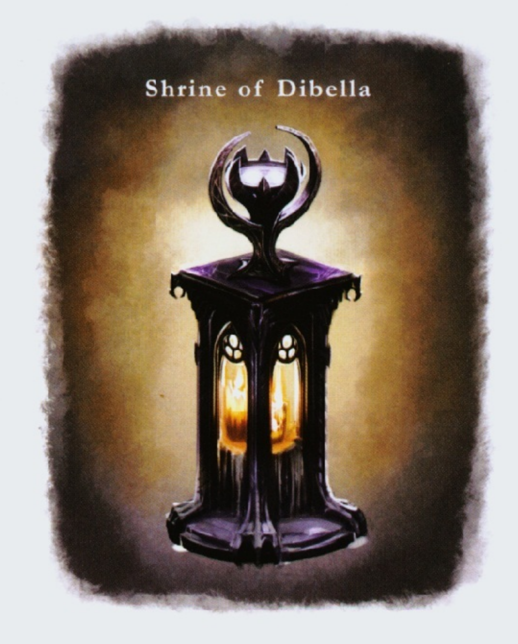


Clavicus Vile

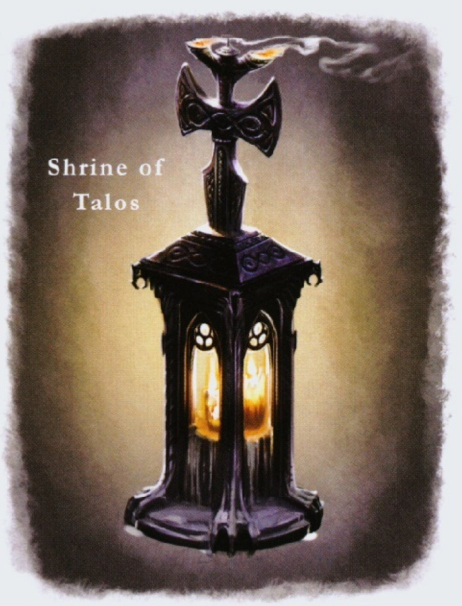


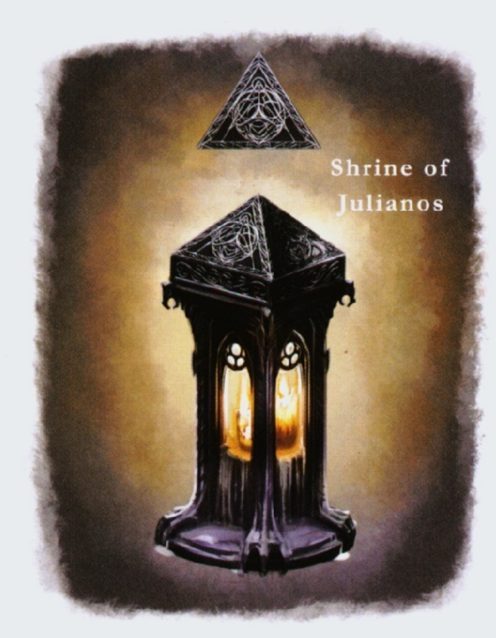
Talos


Shrine of Arkay

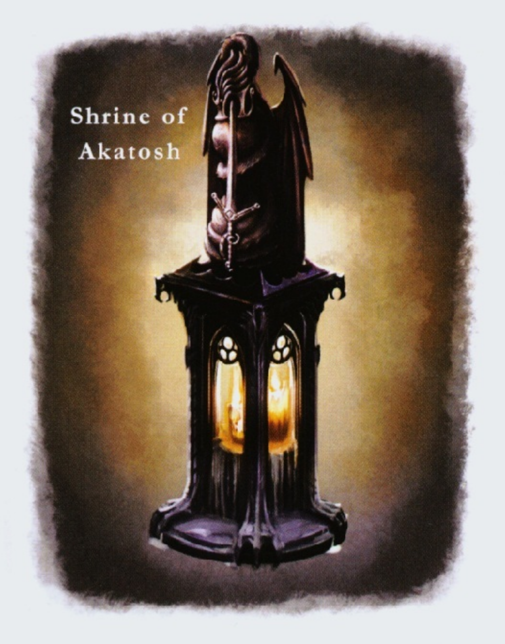

Shrine of Dibella

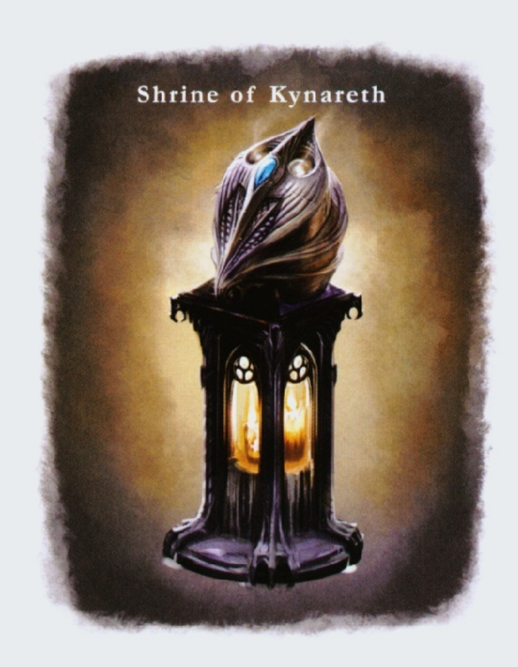

Shrine of Mara

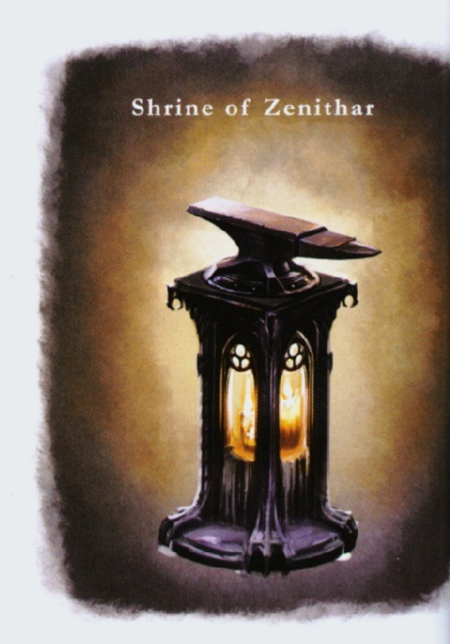

Shrine of
Talos


Shrine of
Julianos


Shrine of Stendarr


Shrine of
Akatosh


Shrine of Kynareth


Shrine of Zenithar

Statues

Scale was something we played with when it came to designing statues. Many of the statues don't have a direct Nordic appearance in order to convey that some of them have been imported from other lands or even have an Astral origin.



Dibella



Azura



Boethia



Statues

There are many sacrificial themes incorporated into the shrines around Skyrim. We tried to tell a story as much as possible along with inserting clues as to their origins.



Malacath



Peryite

Mara





CREATURES





Dragons

Dragons are the centerpiece of Skyrim. We went with a wyvern-like design since that is how they appeared in Redguard. This time around we gave them a more muted, natural color scheme; this helped fit in with the environment.

'I wanted to elaborate on some of the Dragon behaviors and one of the Dragon's shout powers I wanted to visualize the most was Unrelenting Force. It's rare to see Dragons do anything but breath fire in stories so I jumped at the idea of painting this scene.'

–RL









Alduin

The design of Alduin was inspired by volcanic rock, similar to that found in the planes of Oblivion. He was given a dark and ominous color scheme and more jagged features to help set him apart from other Dragons in the game.

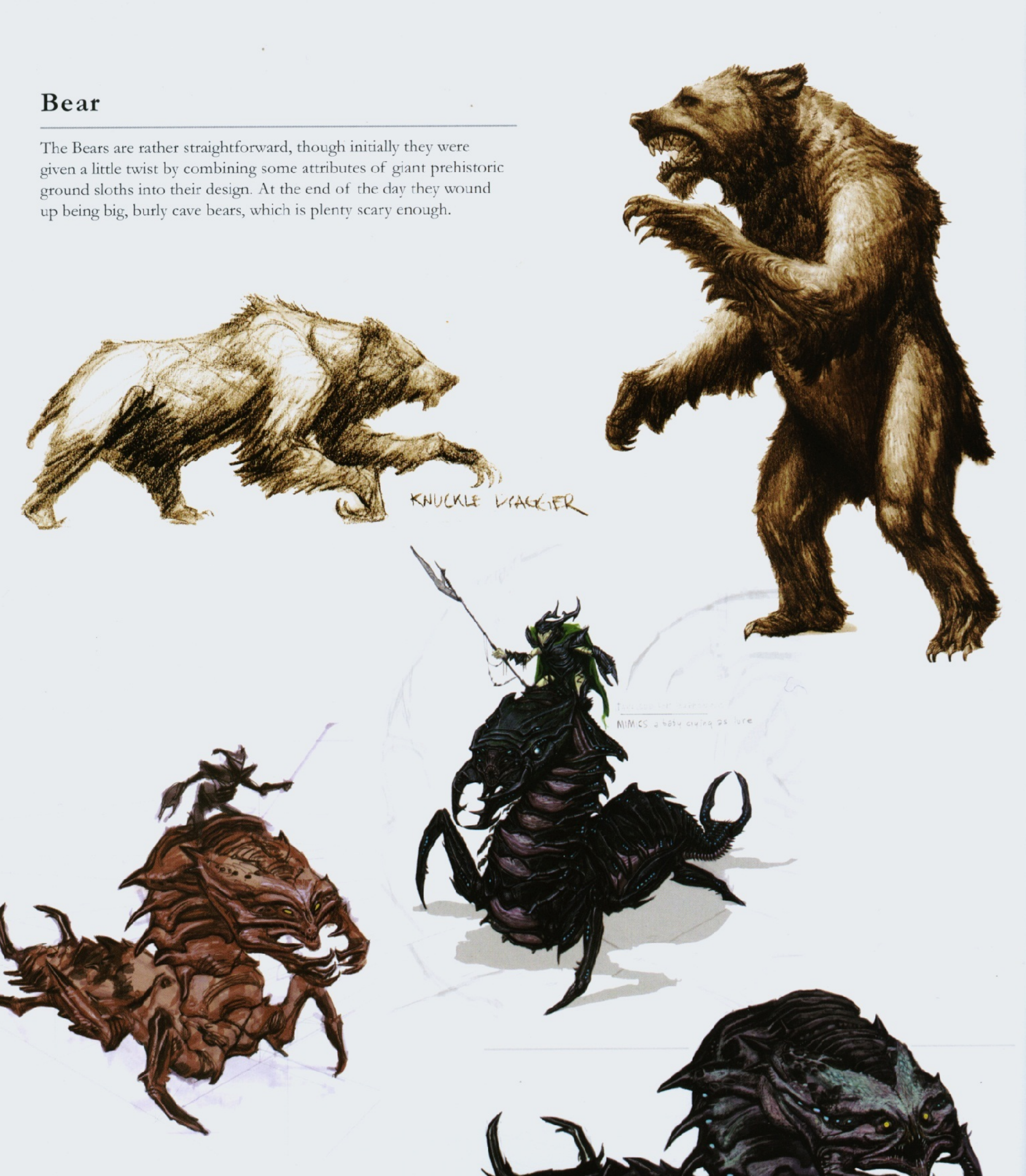






Bear

The Bears are rather straightforward, though initially they were given a little twist by combining some attributes of giant prehistoric ground sloths into their design. At the end of the day they wound up being big, burly cave bears, which is plenty scary enough.



Chaurus

The idea for this creature was to create a subterranean, centipede-like creature that would be a servant to the Falmer. We extended the neck up for more dynamic combat and simplified it to four main legs for easier navigation through the environment.



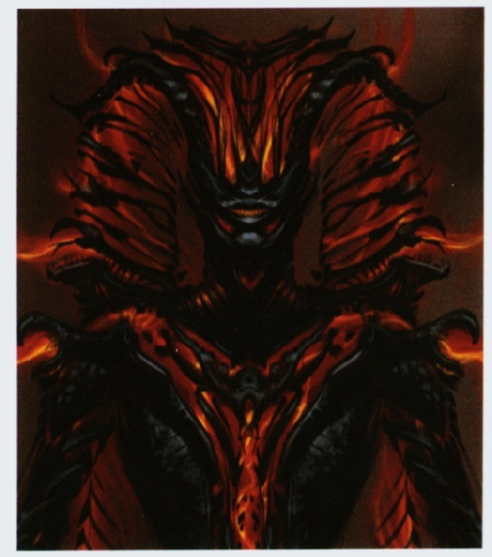


Storm Atronach

The Strom Atronach was designed to mimic the destruction caused by a storm. It is composed of physical elements, like rocks and debris, as well as magical elements that hold it together.

Fire Atronach

All the Atronach designs are very different to illustrate that they each come from different elements. The Fire Atronach is the most unique of the three Atronachs. She is based on a feminine form and was designed to be graceful and elegant while causing destruction.







Frost Atronach

The Frost Atronach was built to look like glacial cliffs in humanoid form. We designed the movement to be slow and lumbering. Each arm shows a different aspect of ice; one is a sharp and jagged blade, while the other is a more compact, blunt instrument.









Draugr

Draugrs are undead warriors who were buried in the ancient Nordic temples to protect them. We wanted to go with the look of mummified humans wearing layers of decrepit armor. We created Draugr-specific hair styles to hint at their previous existence.


-MUH
female
variant
=
wispy
floating
hair strands
like
FEMUR





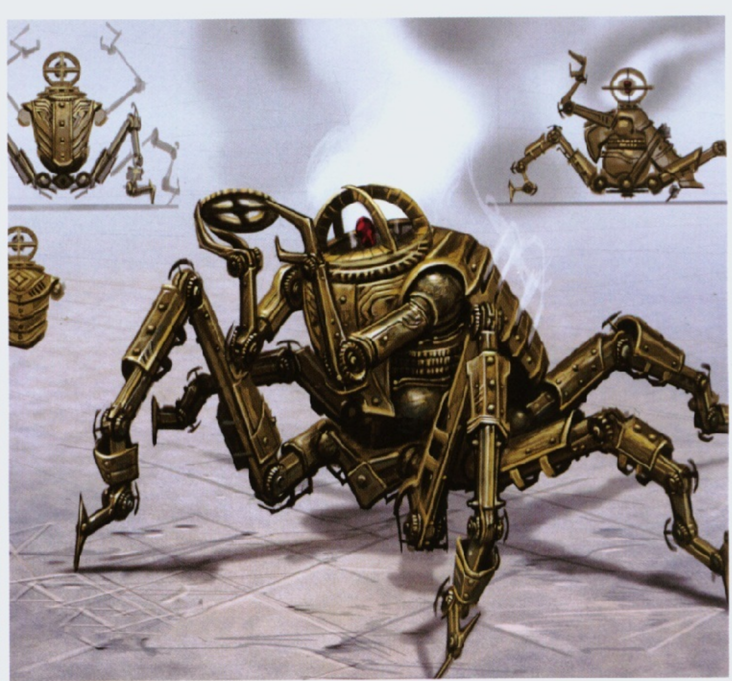

all the



Centurions

The Dwemer Centurions are simple machines come to life with the power of steam and magic. We changed the faces of the Centurions to link them more closely to the extinct race of the Dwemer who originally created them.







Sphere Centurion

Steam Centurion



Spider Centurion



Falmer

In designing the Falmer, the question we asked was, "What would happen if we take a race of Elves, force them underground and see how they evolve?" This led to a paler color scheme, hunched over postures and animations, and a more savage look for Elves.

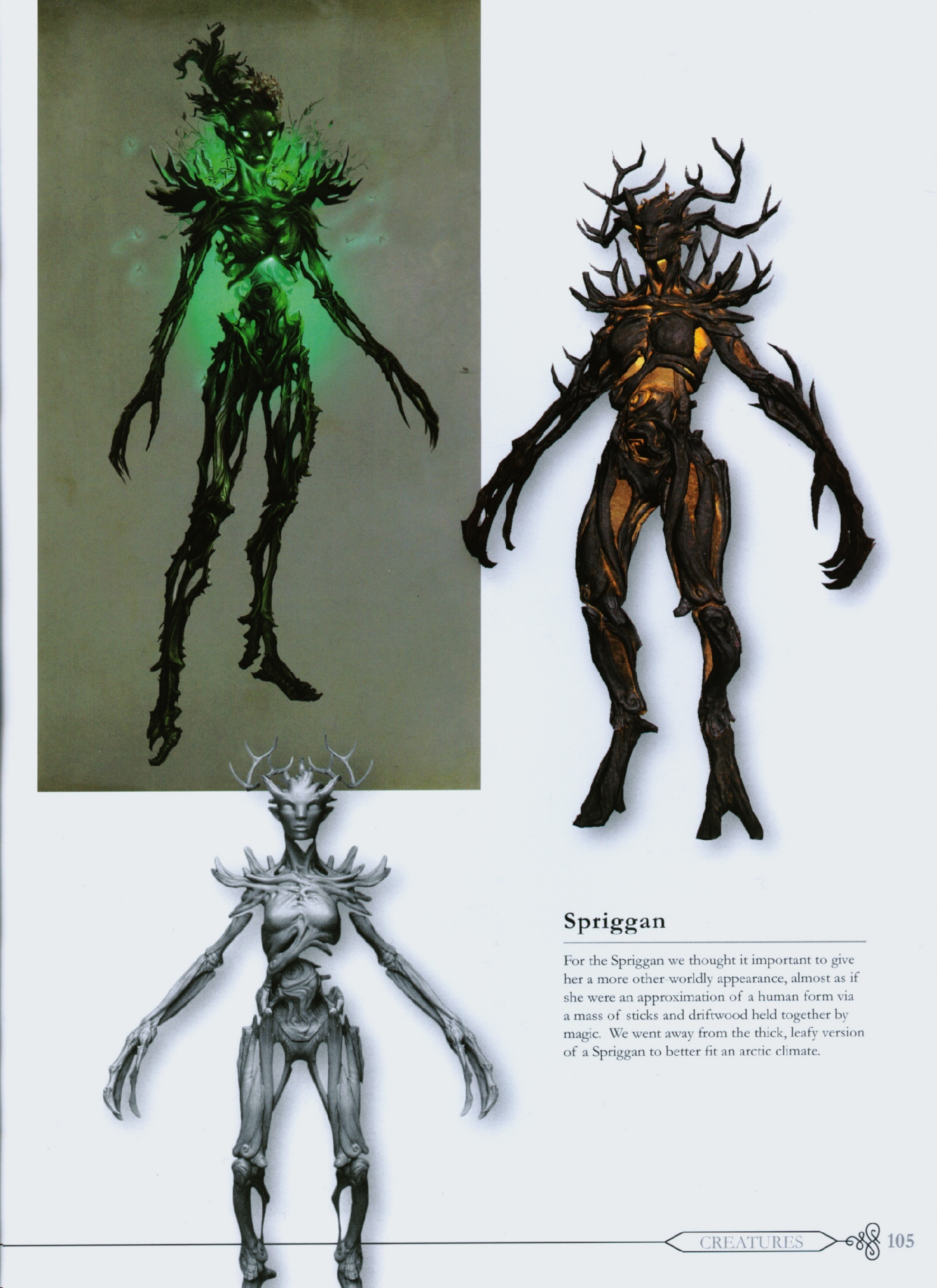






Frostbite Spider

For our Spider, we decided to take a different approach and design around a ground-based arachnid in an attempt to give it a sinister feel.



Spriggan

For the Spriggan we thought it important to give her a more other-worldly appearance, almost as if she were an approximation of a human form via a mass of sticks and driftwood held together by magic. We went away from the thick, leafy version of a Spriggan to better fit an arctic climate.



Mammoth



Giants

Adding Giants to the game was something we have wanted to do for a long time. The success of the Gatekeeper in Shivering Isles helped form the basis for this creature. We purposefully gave him softer facial features to offset his powerful stature and make him appear more neutral.


Necro
MeatSkirt

Hagraven

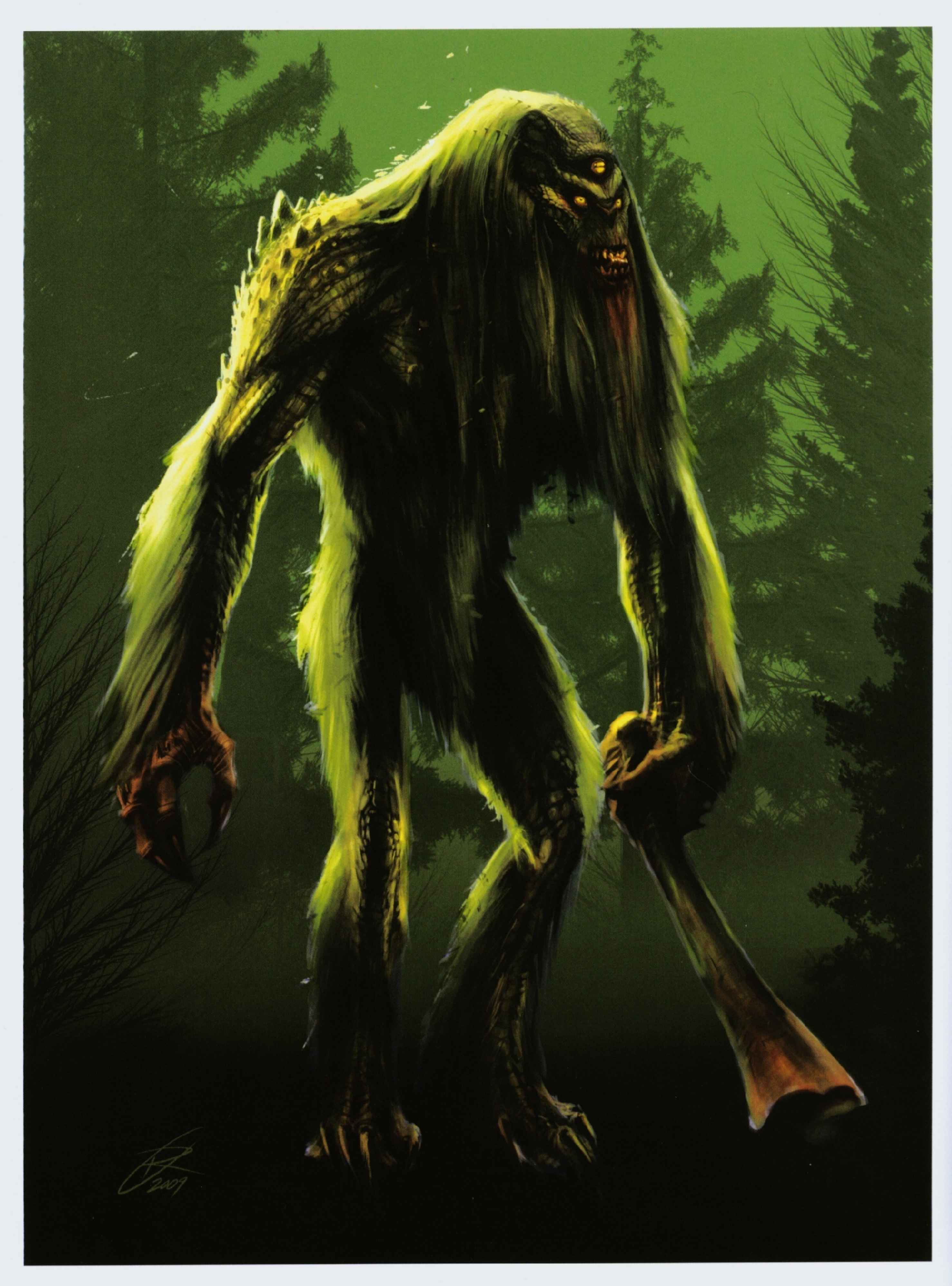
The Hagraven were designed to be the antithesis of the Spriggans; where Spriggans protect nature, the Hagravens corrupt it to gain power. The look of the Hagraven combines an old crone with a raven to create a grotesque body that has been kept alive through magic.





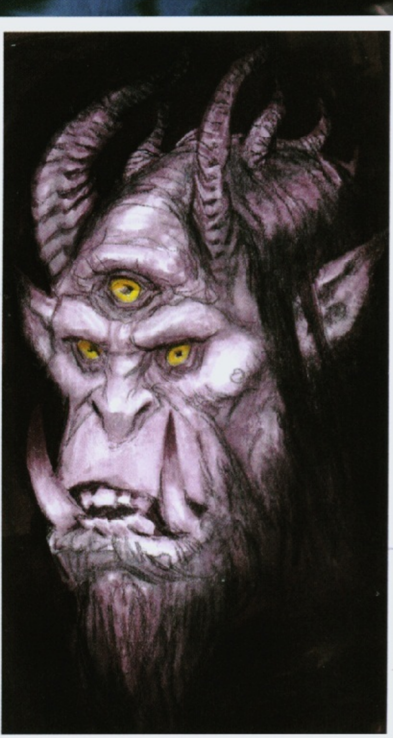
Trolls

After several concepts were explored, we went back to the more traditional Troll design from Morrowind. This time we increased their size and made them more ferocious.



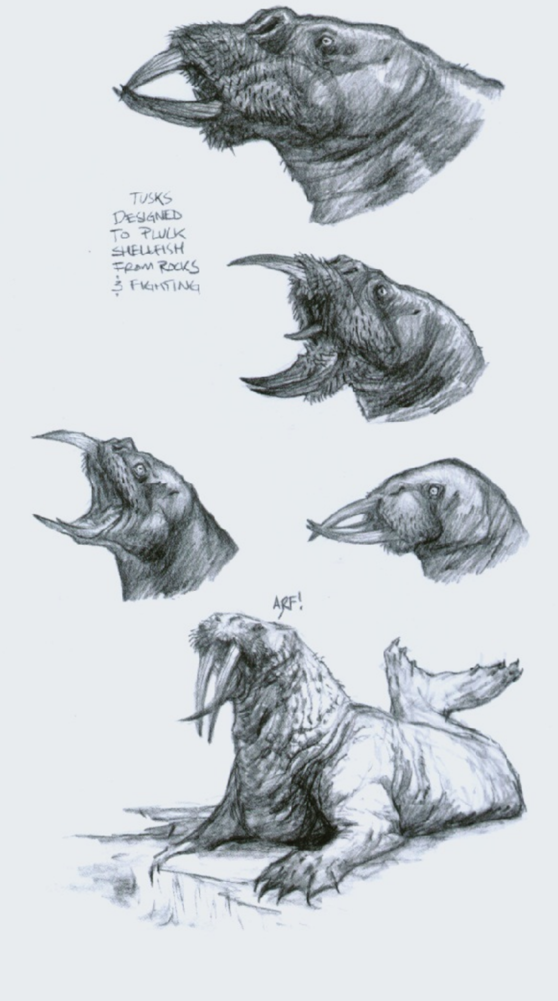






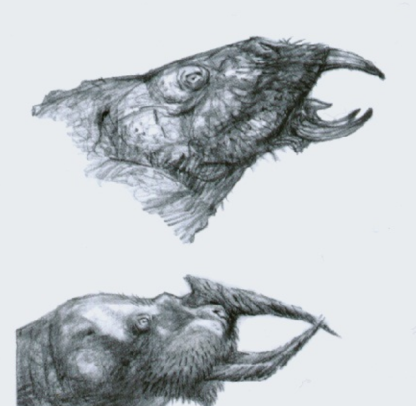

2009

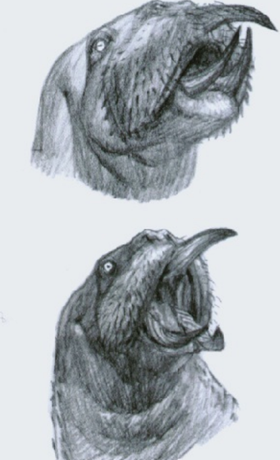














Horker

The Horkers in Skyrim more closely resemble a walrus than the seal-like bodies from Solstheim. The truth of it is that Nords call any sea mammal a Horker.


Wispmother



Werewolf

Werewolves were another creature that went through several iterations before arriving on the final design. Early concepts stuck to a more human form, but ultimately weren't working out. We went with a more bestial form that felt better within the context of the game.

Ice Wraith

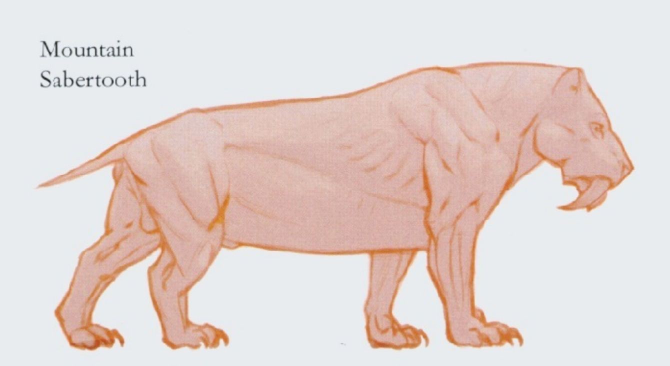
The Ice Wraith's design was inspired by a reference in the lore to Nords hunting Ice Wraiths as a coming-of-age trial. We wanted to create something new with this creature that was dramatically different from other creatures in the game.

"I thought immediately of frozen bear traps in flying serpent form that ethereally and physically freeze your torso with an elemental cold. Kind of like turning the corner in Manhattan during the dead of winter and getting hit with a blast of wind coming up Fifth Avenue at 50 mph."

-AA

Sabertooth

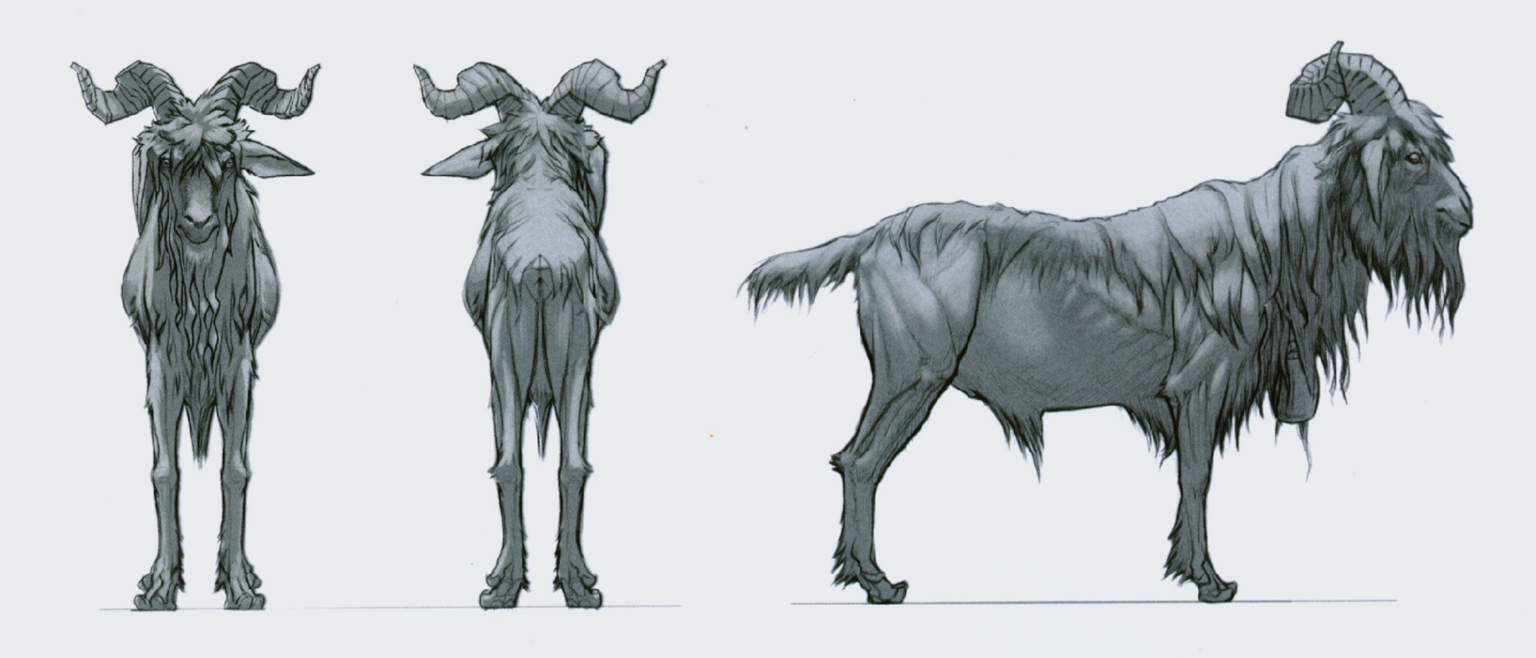
We decided to use two different colorations for the Sabertooth, one for the more southern areas of the game and another for the snowy regions.



Mountain Sabertooth

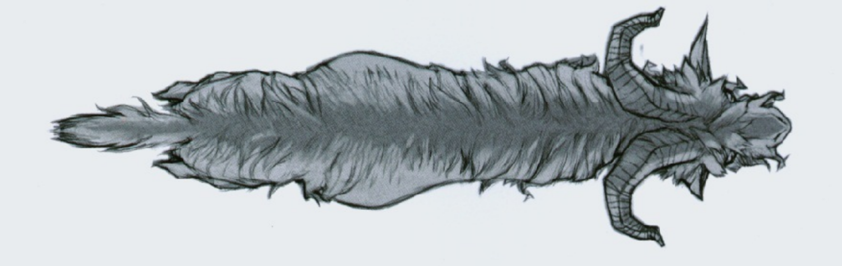


Snow Sabertooth



Goat

The design for the Goat works as a domestic farm animal as well as a wild mountain goat.





Slaughterfish

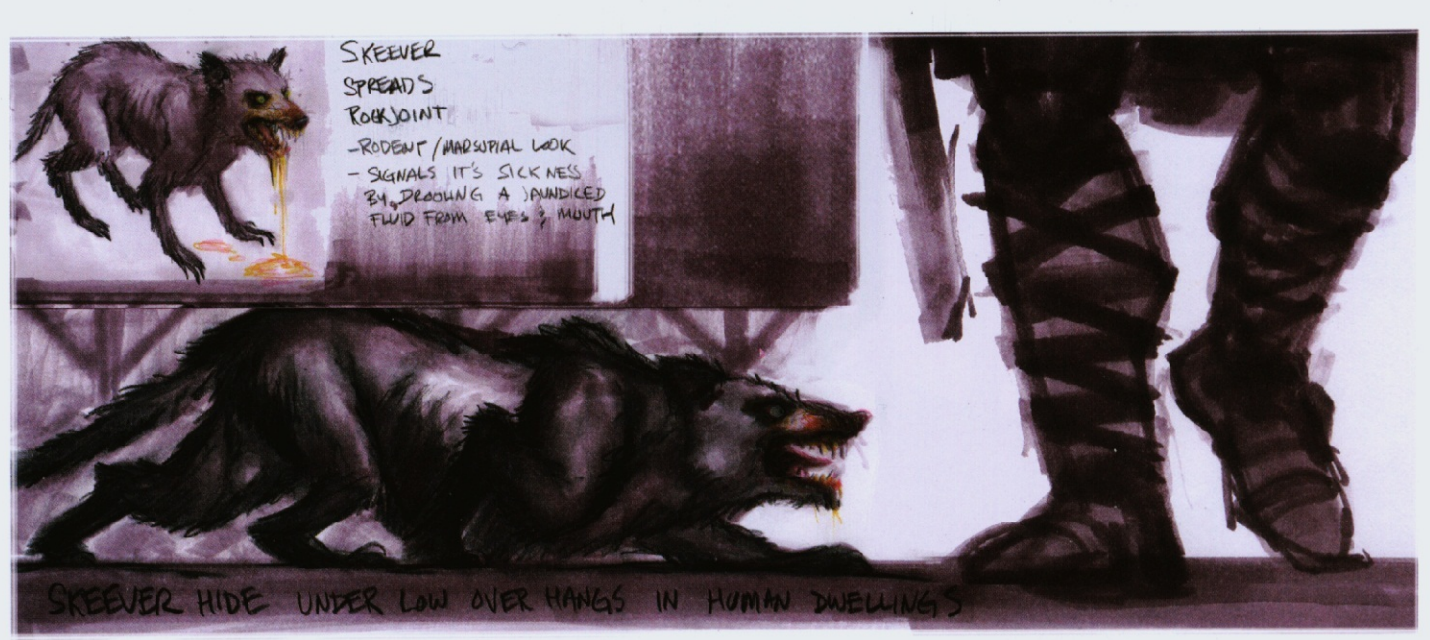
The design for the Slaughterfish went from being eel-like to a more prehistoric fish shape.

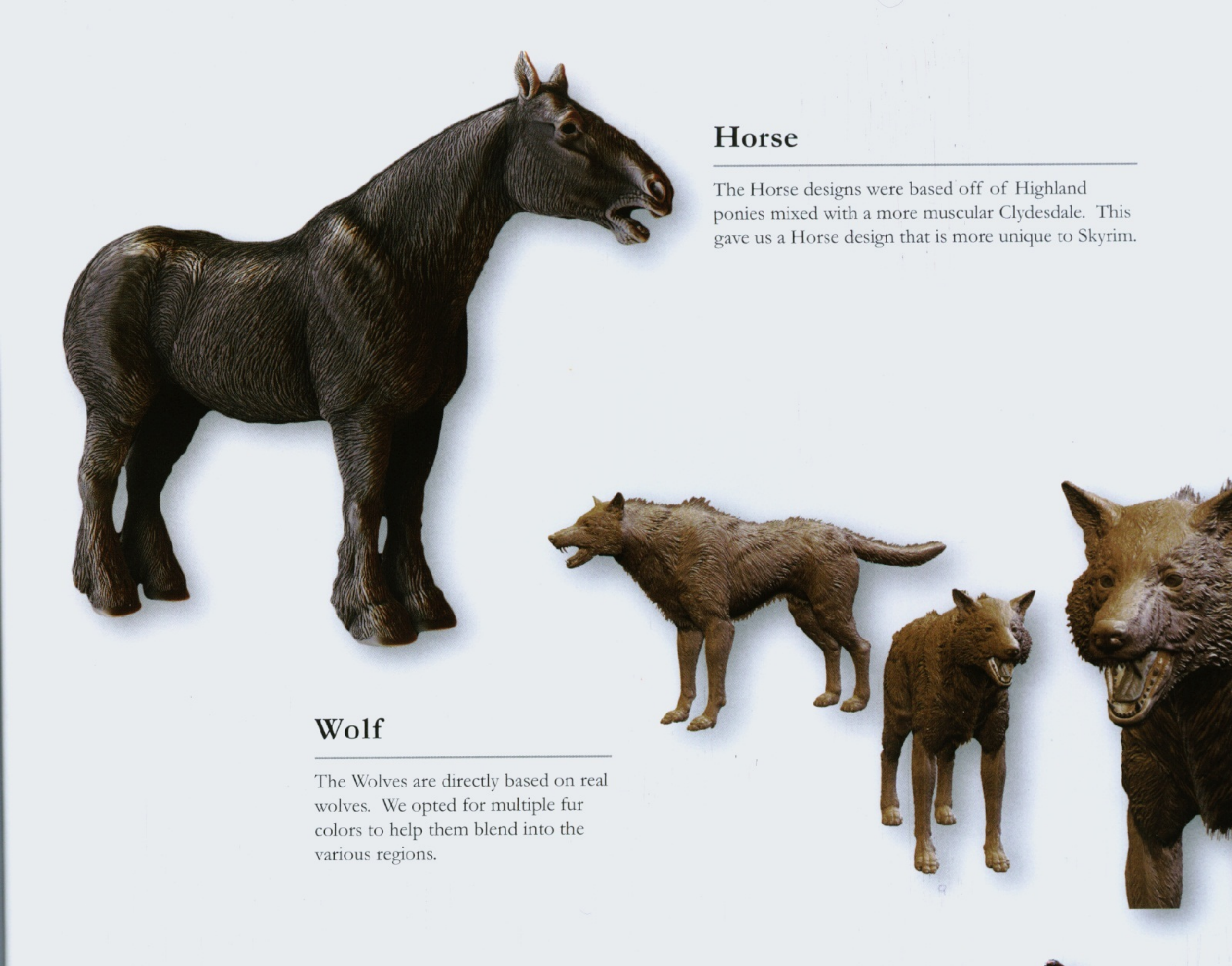




Skeever

We needed an all purpose, low level creature that could go in any area of the game. The Skeever became a more ferocious, rat-like creature that fit this role.





Horse

The Horse designs were based off of Highland ponies mixed with a more muscular Clydesdale. This gave us a Horse design that is more unique to Skyrim.

Wolf

The Wolves are directly based on real wolves. We opted for multiple fur colors to help them blend into the various regions.

Mud Crab

The Mud Crab has been a fan favorite, and we didn't think we could make an Elder Scrolls game without it.





RACES

Argonian

We wanted to push the bestial aspect of the Argonians further with this game than we have in previous games. We concentrated on adding more reptilian features that broke up the silhouette; these include heavy brow ridges, a spiked jaw, and several horn and feather variations.

Breton

Bretons are the average human race. They have more rounded and softer features compared to the other human races.

Dark Elf

The Dark Elves are the most rugged of the Elven races. Their faces are more pitted and cracked, and they have sharper features.

High Elf

The High Elves have taller and more severely drawn faces. This visually compliments their elitist personalities.



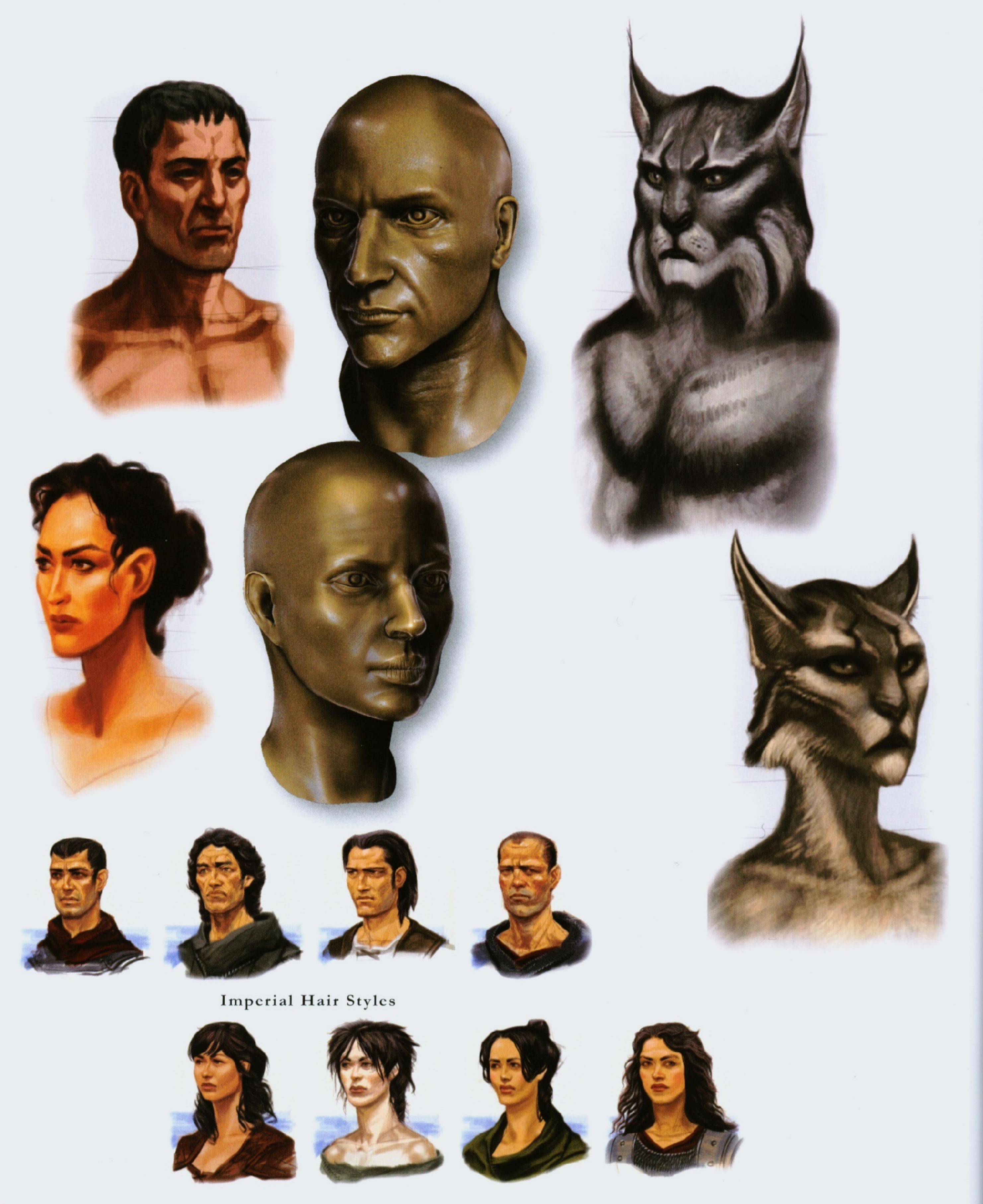
Dark Elf Hair Styles

Imperial

The Imperial race is based off of classical features. They generally have strong facial structures, and darker skin and hair tones.

Khajiit

The shapes of the Khajiit face were inspired by a lynx, with the coloration and patterning of a snow leopard.



Imperial Hair Styles

Nord

The Nords are the primary race of Skyrim. They have fair skin and hair that contrasts against their strong facial features.

Orc

We designed the Orcs to look more fierce to reflect their harsh, tribal nature.



Orc Hair Styles

Redguard

When we designed the Redguards, we based them off of Moorish culture. This gave us a unique combination of looks that could fit many characters.

Wood Elf

The Wood Elves are the wildest of the three Elf races. We gave them tan skin and more unkempt hair styles.



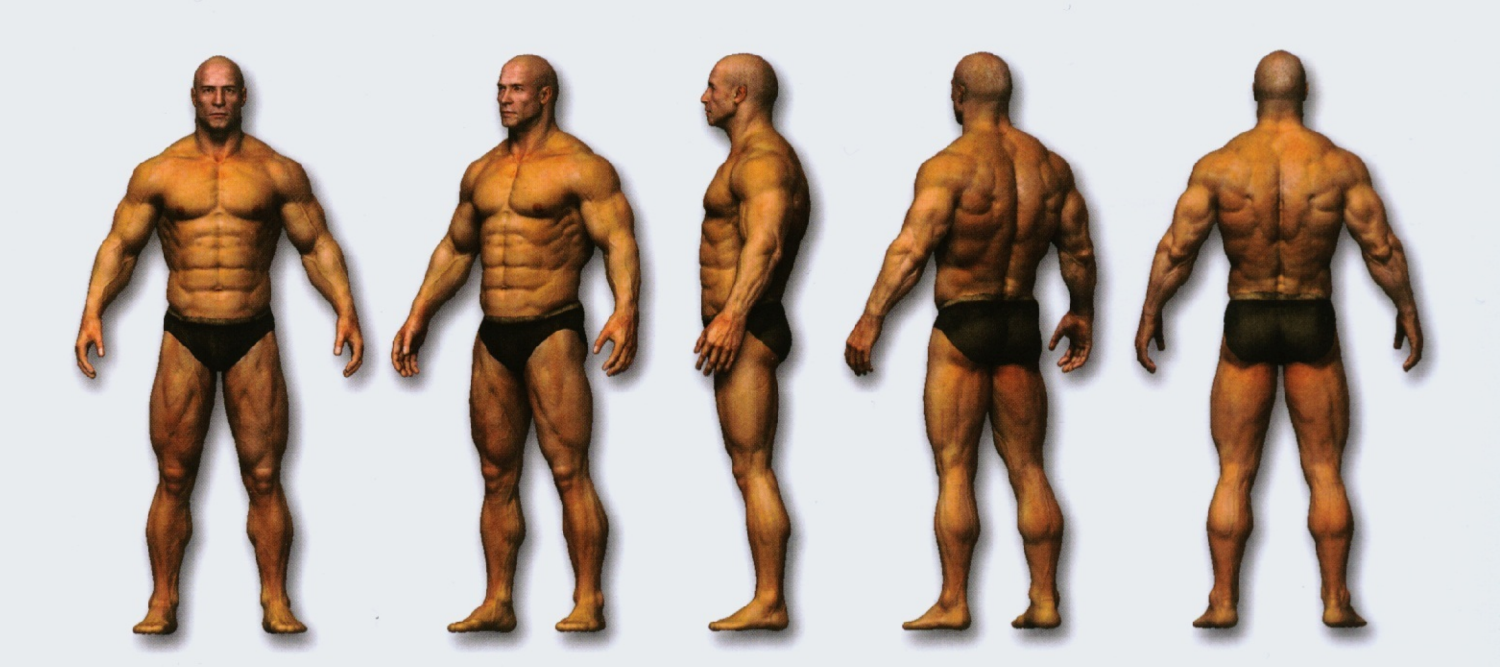
Body Types

As a new feature to the Elder Scrolls, you can now choose your build. This allowed for a greater variety of characters.

Light build

Medium build

Heavy build







CLOTHING

Mage Clothing

The Mages needed a bit of a different treatment than previous incarnations. This was done by giving them unique and somewhat stylish cuts to their tunics and robes. Asymmetry and the number "three" played heavily into the design, hence all the offset triangular shapes.











Mage Guild
Robe Sketches


Psijic
Clothing
Nocturnal
Clothing



Mythic Dawn Clothing

Dark Brotherhood Clothing



Thalmor Clothing

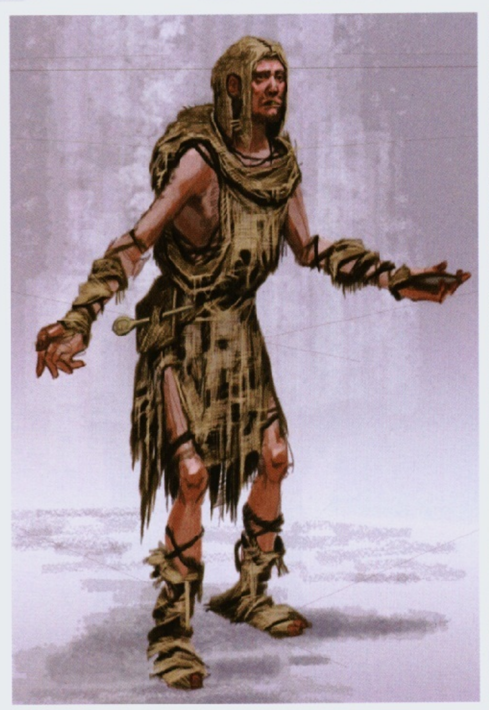
Barmaid Clothing



Farmer Clothing











Yarl Clothing





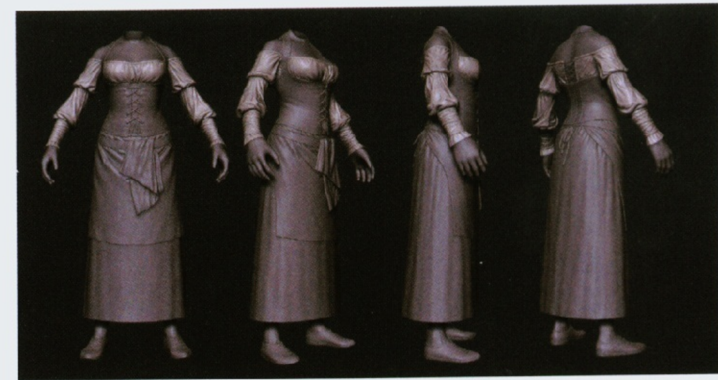
Sheogorath's Clothing

Redguard Clothing



Barkeep Clothing











Miner Clothing





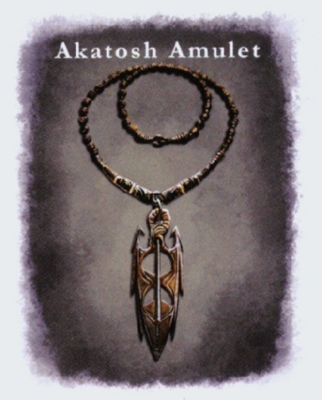


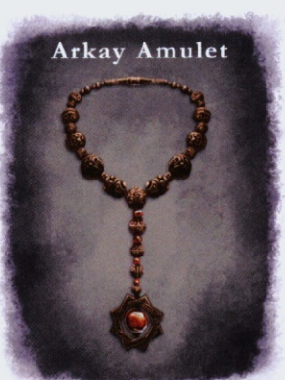


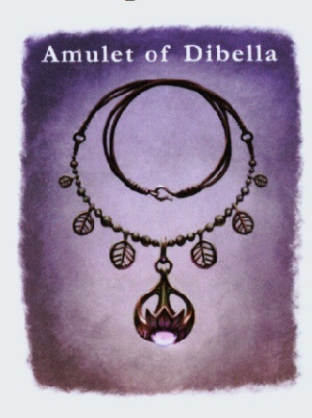


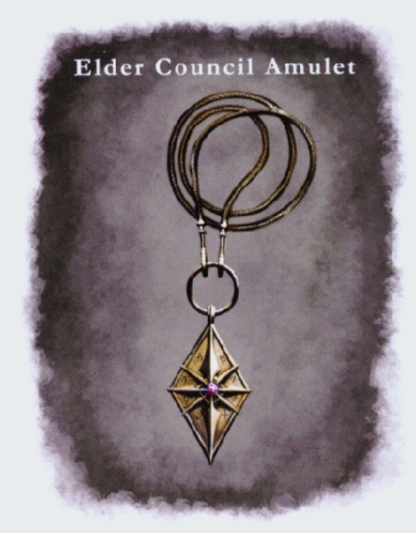
Amulets

Unique silhouettes and Elder Scrolls lore played heavily into designing the Amulets. The goal was to incorporate symbolism and back-story into each one.

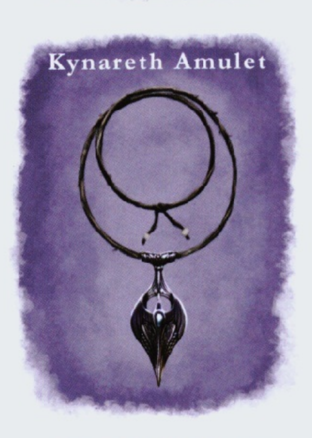






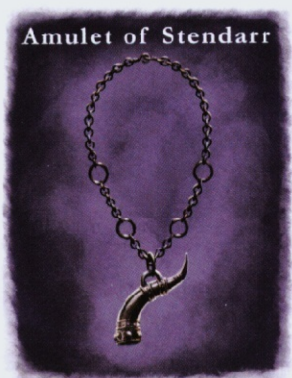




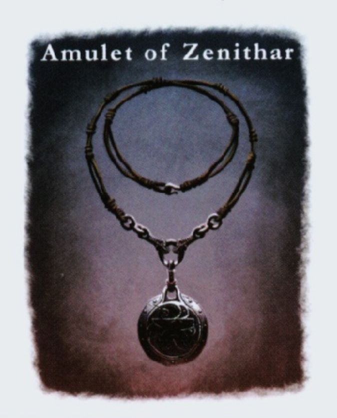












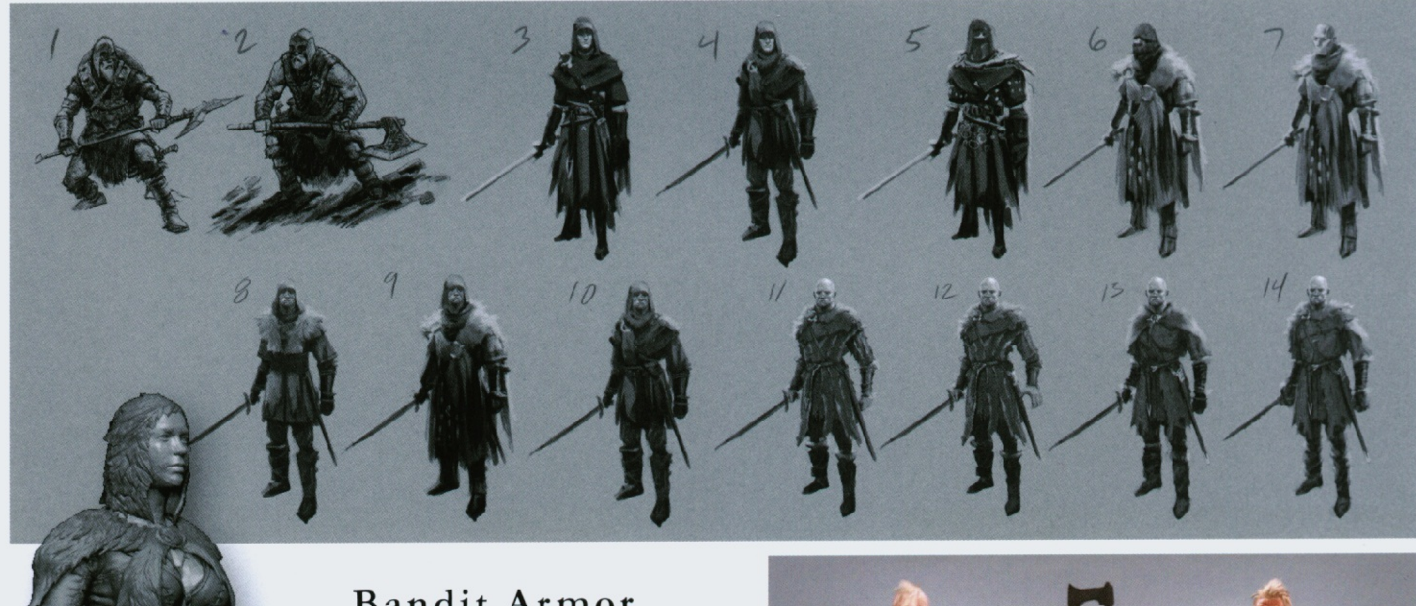




ARMOR


Bandit Clothing


Bandit Female



Bandit Armor

We wanted to establish the Bandits as somewhat nomadic and rugged. By clothing them in wolf pelts and leather, we provided them with light armor and plenty of warmth for the cold Nordic nights.


Bandit Variant


Forsworn Chief






Forsworn Female


Forsworn Male





Forsworn Armor

Forsworn development began early on (almost by accident) with this initial sketch done on the cover of one of Ray's sketchbooks just for fun. Matt Carofano walked by and said, "Dude! Those are the Forsworn!"





Imperial Armor

The color red was reserved for the Imperials so players could clearly see the presence of the Empire in Skyrim. To convey a more civilized contrast to the more rustic Stormcloaks, leather and steel took the place of fur and more roughly-hewn metal plating.









Blades Armor

Dwarven Armor

Leather Armor

Dragonbone Armor

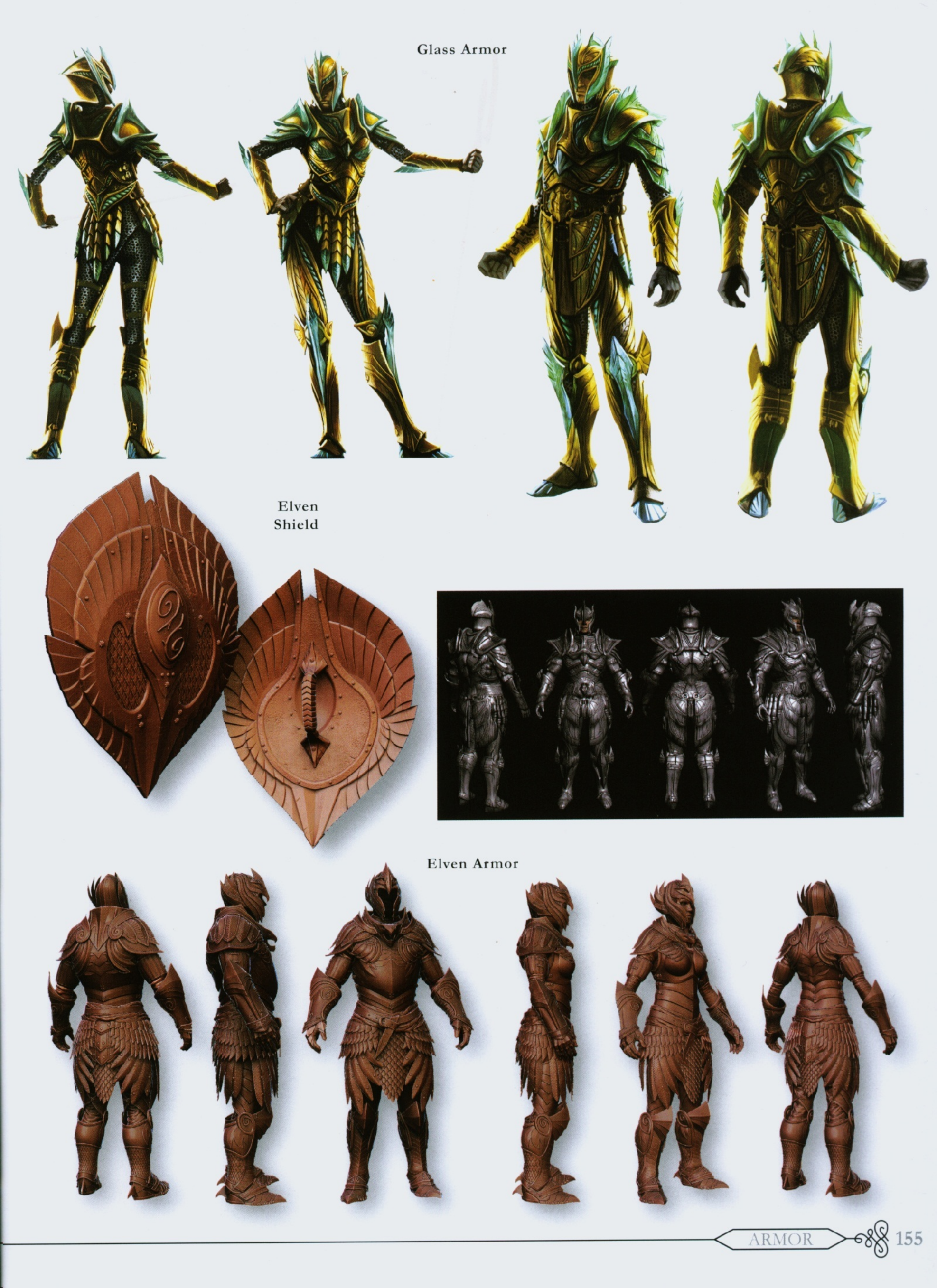
Dragon Priest Mask

Heavy Armor

This armor had to visually communicate a higher level of fighting prowess and invulnerability. The raw materials would be harvested in some cases from defeated Dragons.

Nord Plate Armor




Glass Armor
Elven Shield
Elven Armor



Nord Armor

Steel & Fur Armor





Savior Armor











Dark Brotherhood Armor



Thieves Guild Armor





Female Nightingale Armor



Male Nightingale Armor

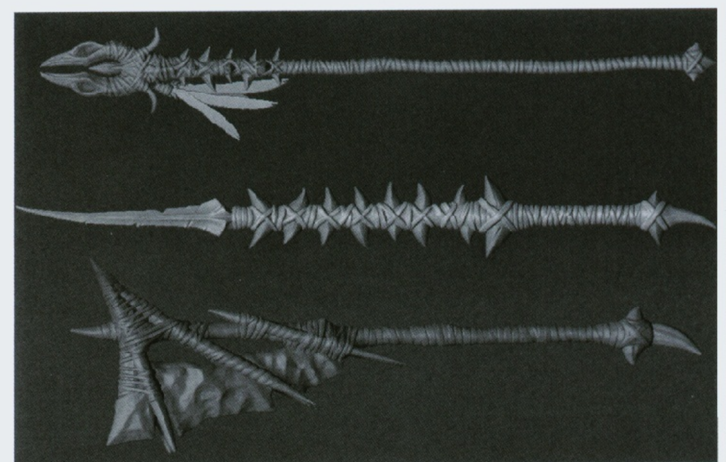


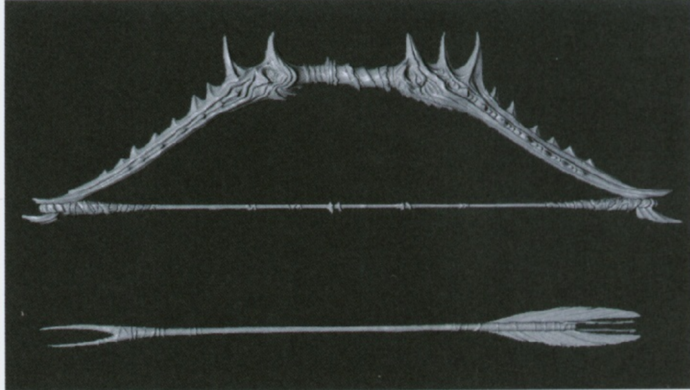
Artifacts

The Eye of Magnus was felt to have a similar origin to the Elder Scroll itself – a distant and mysterious object that possibly crashed like a meteor into earth eons ago. Nobody knows how it got here, but one thing is for sure: it holds immeasurable power inside.

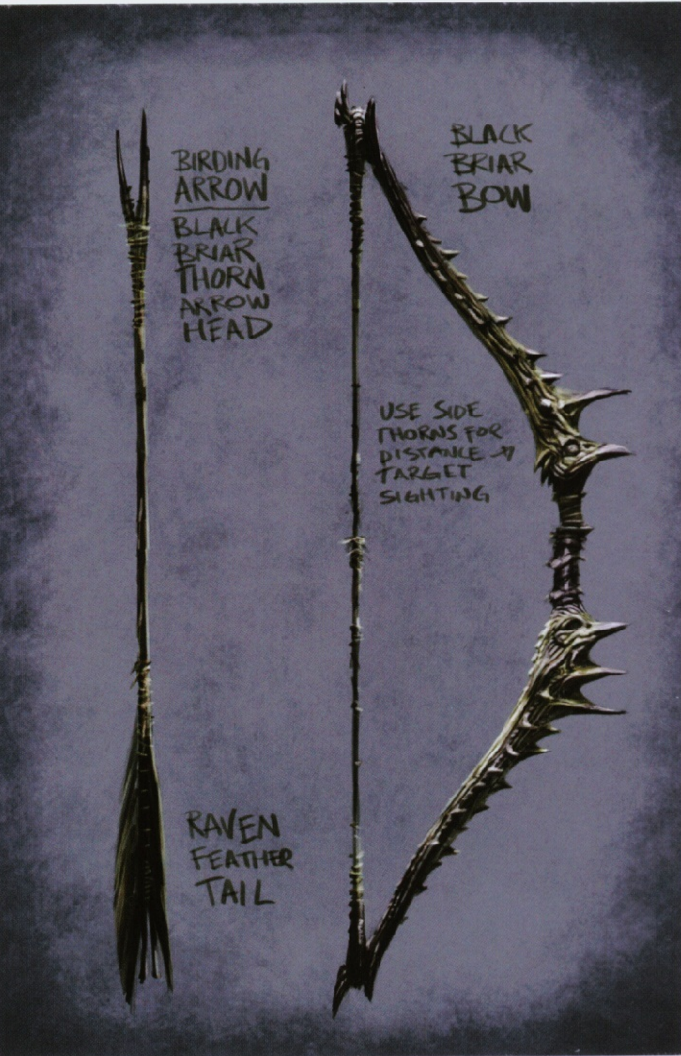
WEAPONS

We understand how valuable weapons are to the player, so we focused on each weapon set to emphasize their importance. In Skyrim we tied each set of weapons to a race in order to show a unique culture in how they were made. Most of the weapons in the game are made by Nords, so we wanted to make it obvious when you come across a set that isn't Nordic. For example, the ebony weapon set is made by Dark Elves, so we gave it a more sinister and curved style. As you level up, the weapon sets you find become more intricate. This allows for a great amount of variety in discoveries for the player.





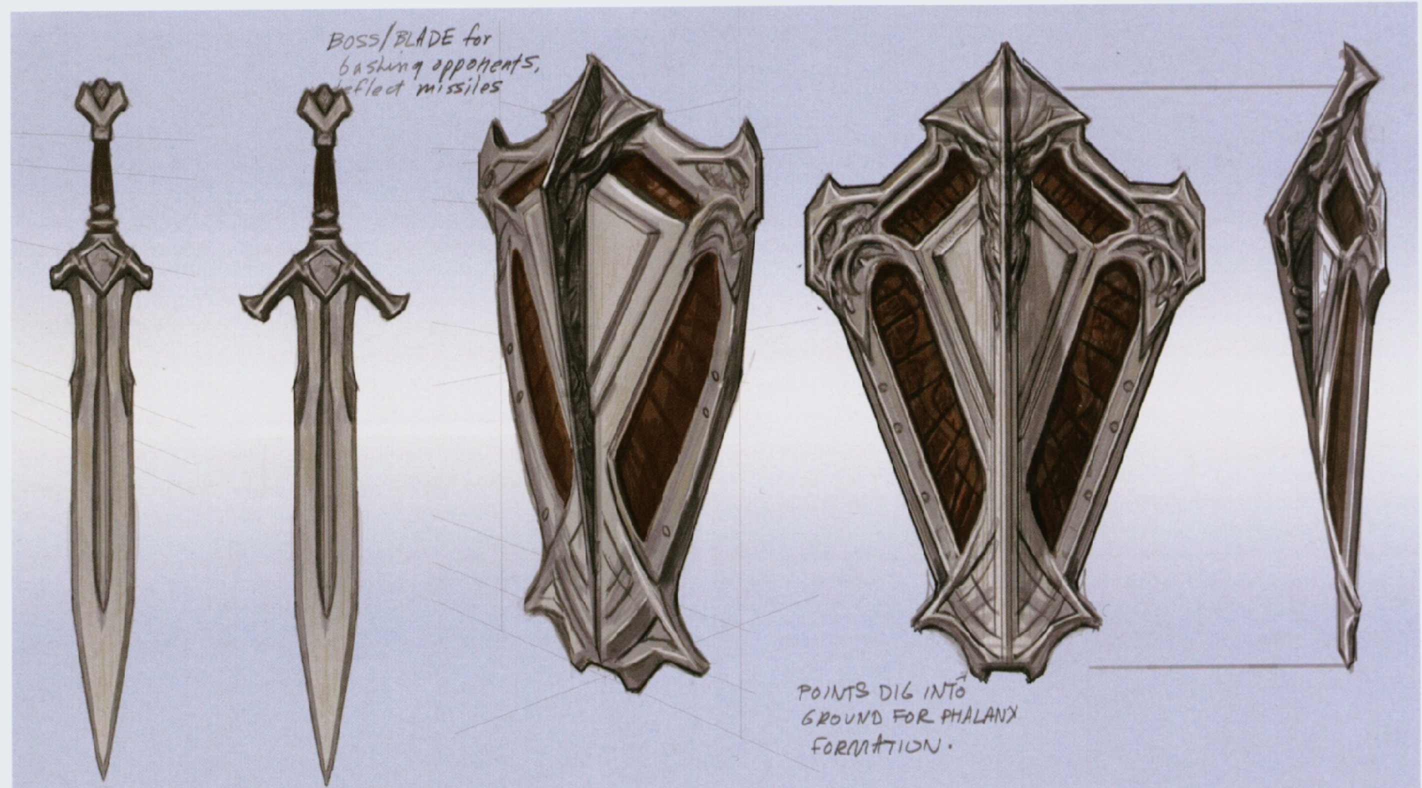








Ysgramor Axe "Elfgrinder" and Shield





The Mace of Molag Bal



Skeleton Key





Ebony Weapons





Daedric

We wanted these to look like they were forged by demons. They are rough and jagged to reflect the realm of Oblivion.

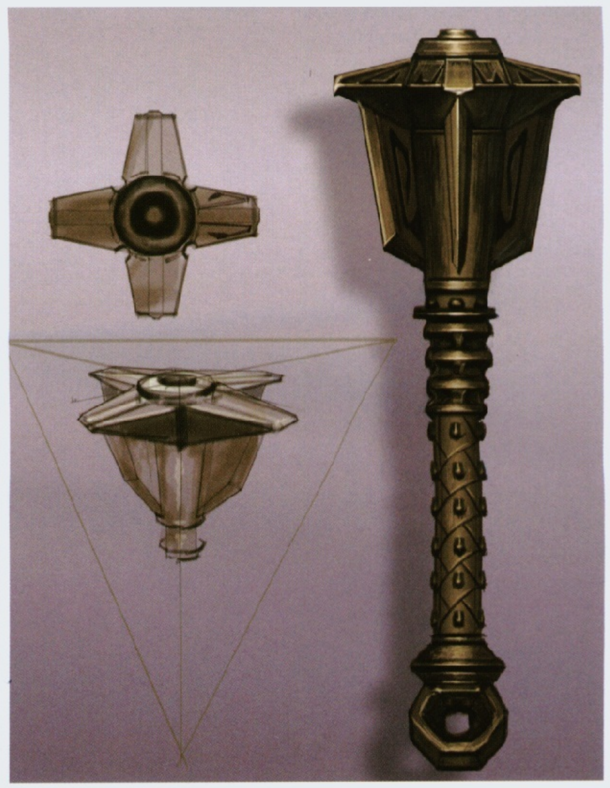
Nordic

These are the oldest set of weapons in the game, and as a result are the most roughly constructed.













Dwemer

The Dwemer weapons are more angular and structured forms that reflect the more mechanical culture of the Dwemer.





Elven

Keeping the avian winged theme of Oblivion was important, so the idea of adding beaked and taloned flourishes came naturally to the design.

Falmer

Made from Chaurus chitin, this weapon set shows the relationship they have with the Chaurus.



Glass

Hinting at an Elven design sense was on our minds in designing the glass weapon and armor sets. This time we really embraced the translucent glass being the main theme, instead of being a decoration on top of steel. This is probably the most "high fantasy" weapon design in the game.

Iron

Iron is the most basic weapon set in the game. It needed to reflect its common use and simple design.



Orc

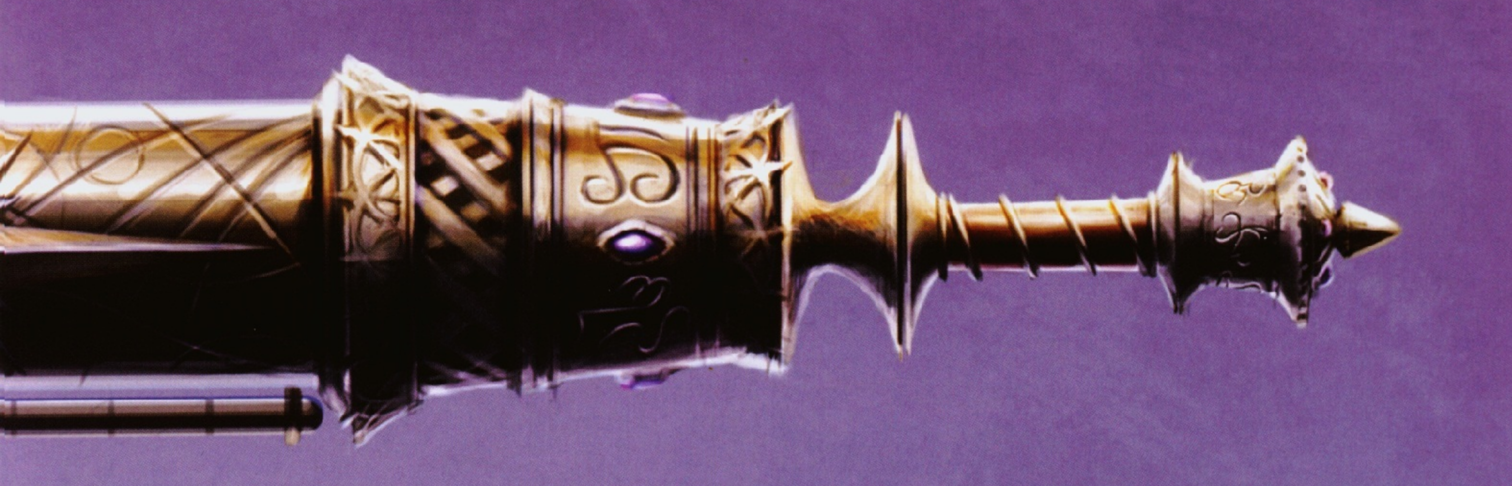
The goal with these concepts was to communicate a simplistic design while showing off the ability to craft a fearsome and highly effective weapon. Lots of arcs and curves to work around and pry open chinks in an opponent's armor are the main goals of these weapons.

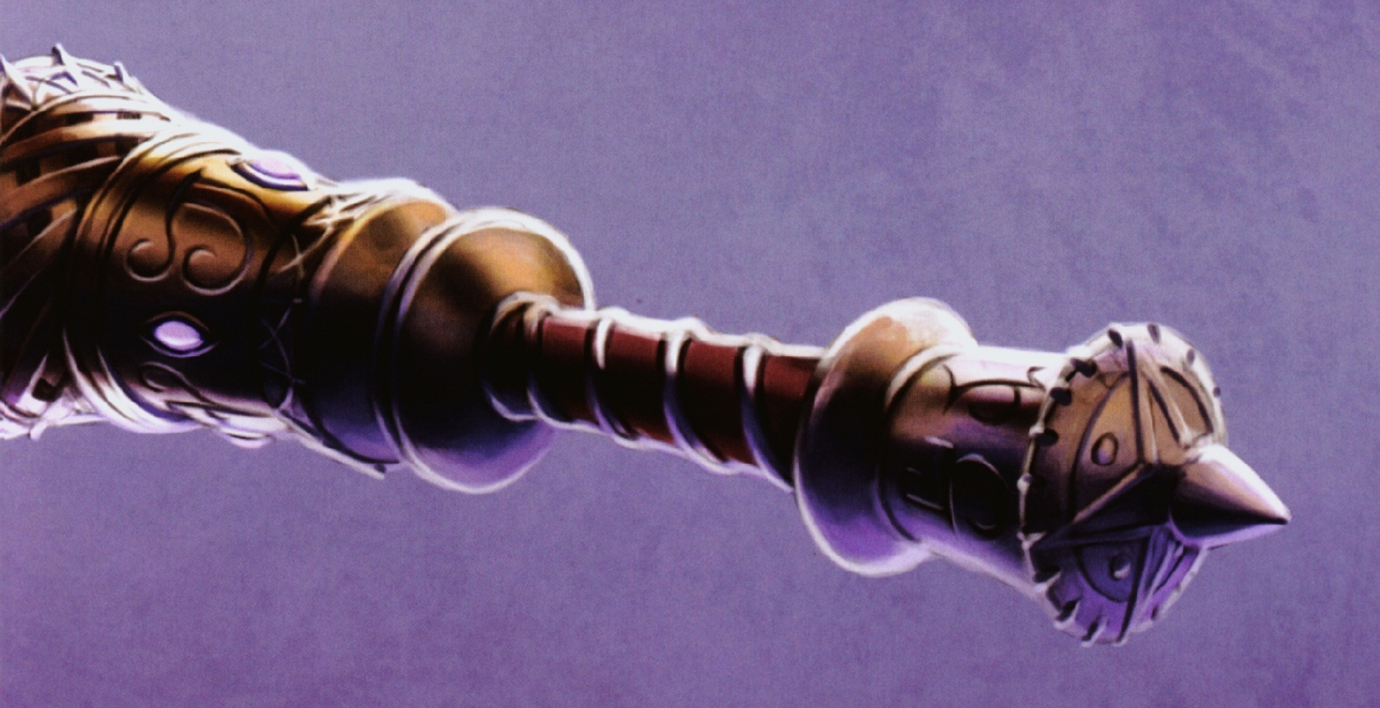


Steel

Steel is the first set of well-crafted weapons the player can find in the game. They have more polished surfaces and finer details.







ITEMS

Items

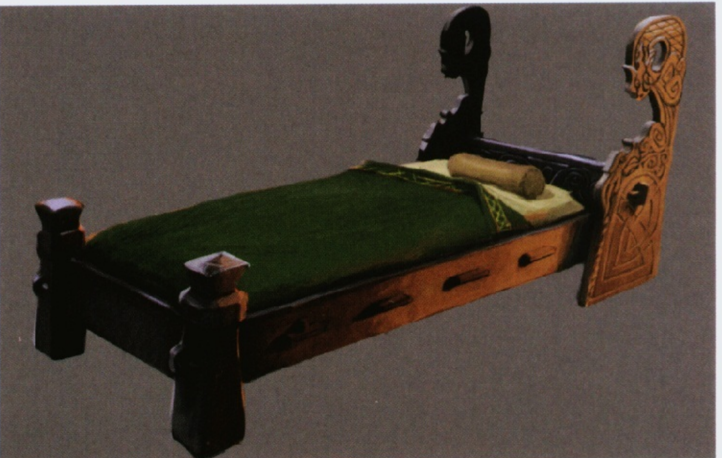
Items are in the game to help tell a visual story. These items range from the clutter we place in a house to the unique quest reward that is essential to the game. Often these items are used in abundance throughout the world, all of them telling a story with their placement.

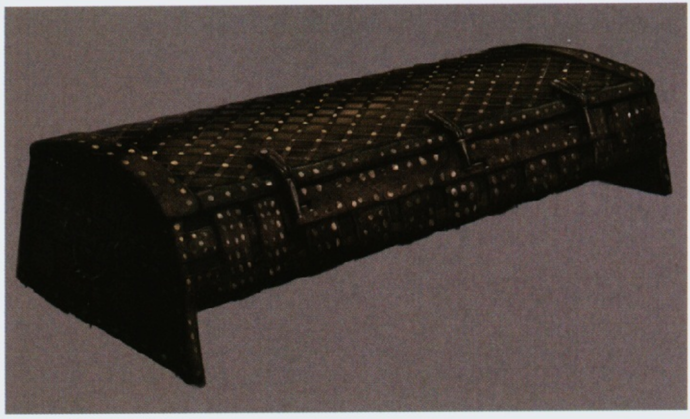


Furniture

In an iron age, things like nails would be a highly sought-after commodity. People with a bit of wealth throughout the ages have almost always striven to be ostentatious, so the idea of hammering lots of nails into a bench or chair seemed to fit a Nord theme of steel being prized over anything else. In a pinch, they could be removed and forged into a weapon as well.









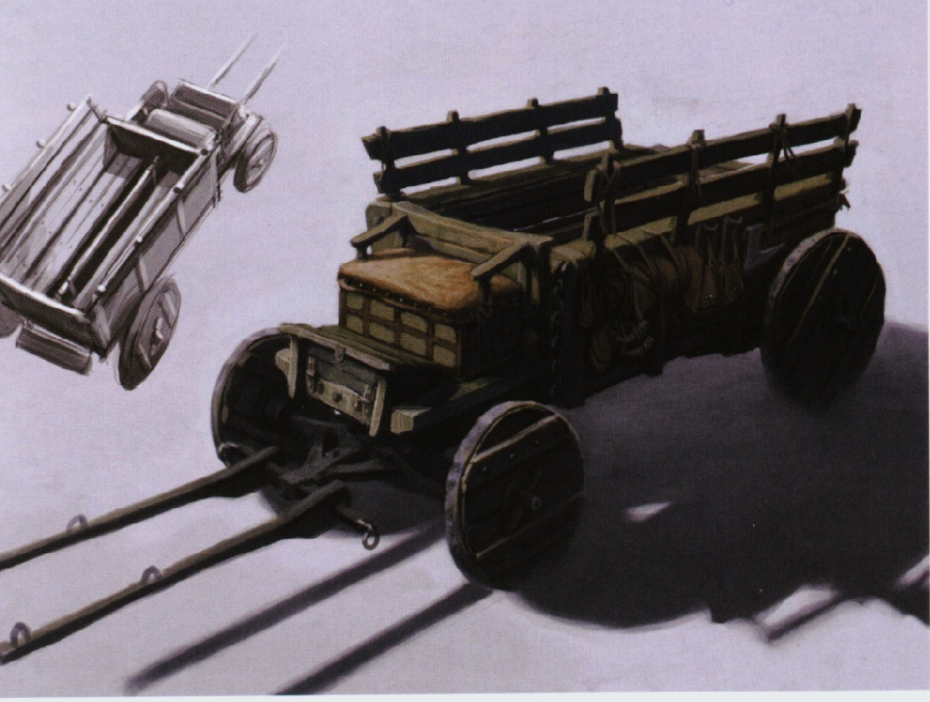













EFFECTS



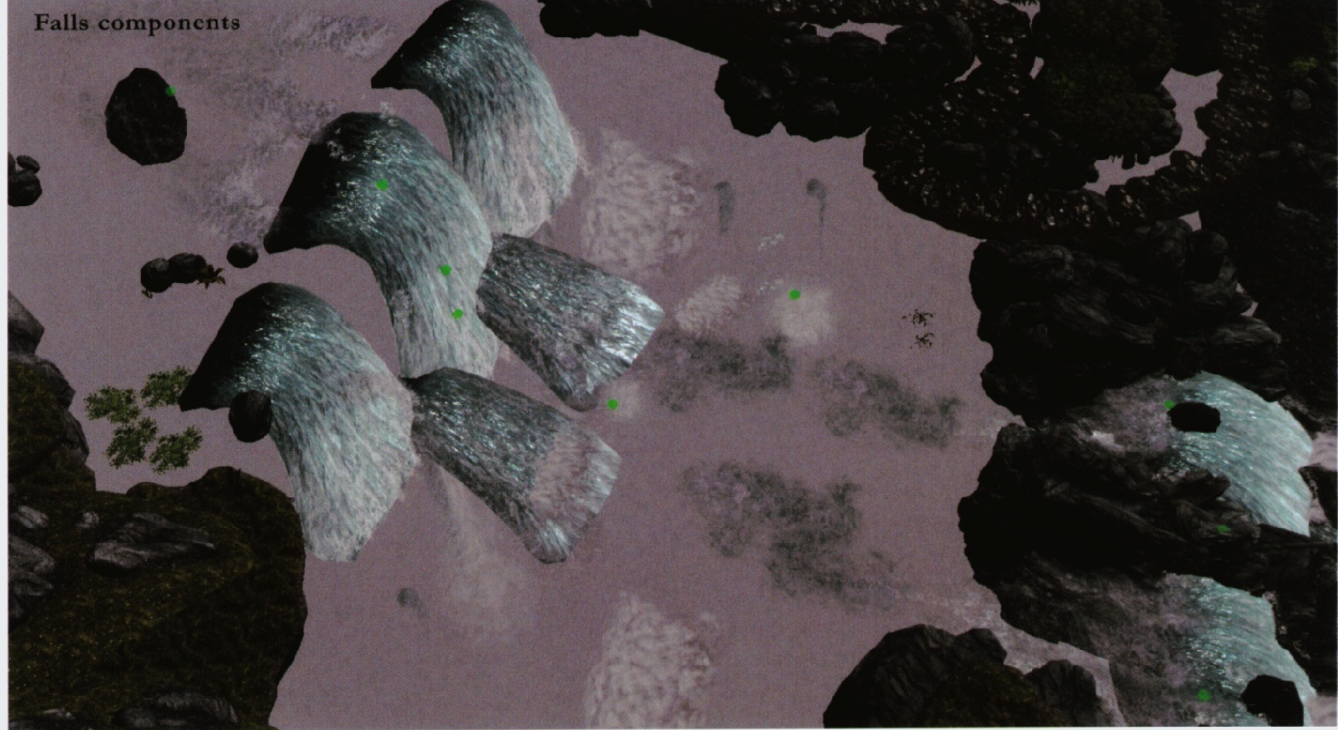




Creek components

Creek Effects

By removing effects you can start to understand the impact they can have on the final scene.



Falls Effects

The water effects pieces are built as a set that can be used together to create the many shapes needed for the landscape of Skyrim.



With FX added

Bleak Falls Effects

In this scene the effects enhance the final view of the dungeon. It is important to show the player that he or she has reached a key point in the dungeon.

Spider Den Effects

The special effects in this dungeon help root the spider into the world. Here the layers of webbing, dust, and desiccated corpses create a lair that is unique to this creature.



With FX added

Magic Concepts Effects

These are early prototypes and concepts for the magic system to help illustrate the differences between the types of spells.





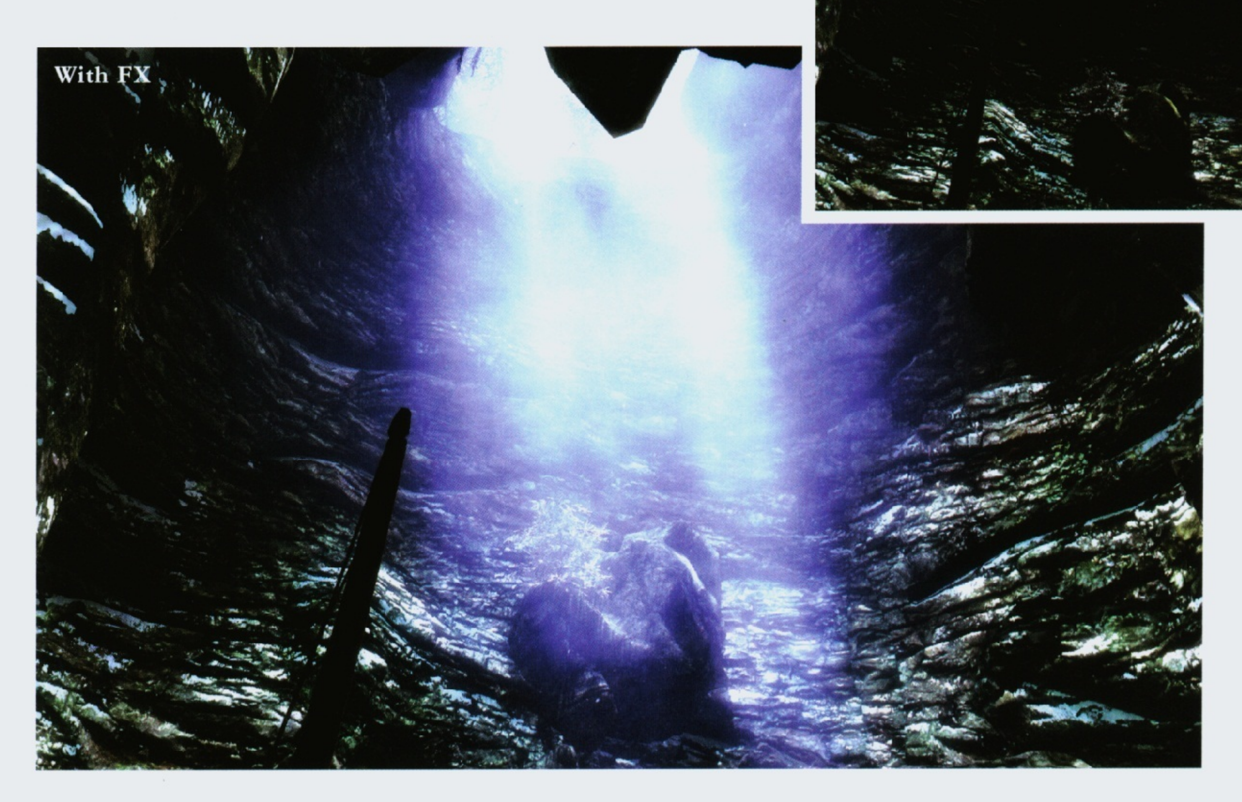
No FX

With FX

Light Beam Effects

These images show the dramatic difference that adding effects can make to an environment.

No FX



Flame Pot Effects

In these scenes a trap is being triggered where an oil pot catches fire, explodes, and then slowly burns out.





Dragon Dissolve Effects

This is an example of one of the key effects sequences in the game. Since dragons aren't ordinary creatures, we felt their deaths should be spectacular. There are two parts to this death sequence. The first is the dragon's body returning to its pre-resurrected, skeletal form. The second part of this sequence shows the player absorbing the dragon's soul, which is an integral gameplay moment.



Landscape

With an expansive world for player exploration, environmental scenery is not only a defining aspect of the graphics, but a character itself within the world of the Elder Scrolls. These conceptual screenshots, taken from our editor, bring together and solidify several key elements used to set the visuals for landscape in Skyrim: epic mountains, ethereal clouds, and a moody, windswept tone.



Trees

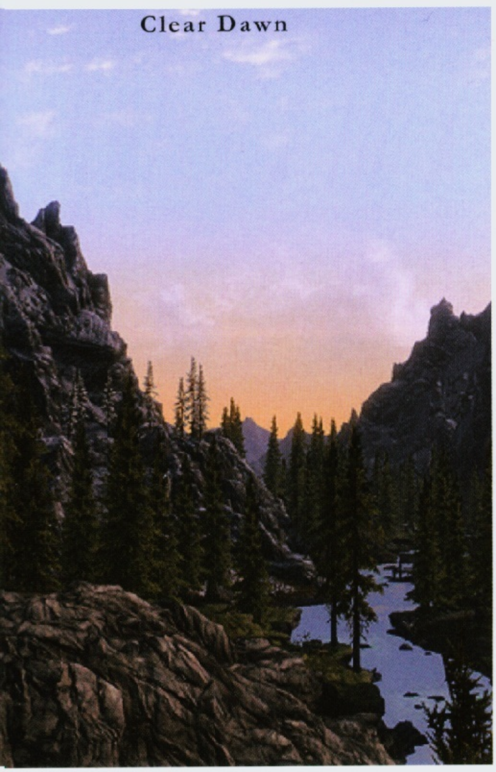
Our entire tree pipeline was reengineered for Skyrim. Every component of tree foliage is now fully 3D, allowing triangle faces to cast and receive shadows. Texture maps used on branch and leaf surfaces are rendered from high resolution geometry comprised of individual, artist-built leaves and stems, offering clean alpha maps and perfectly composed arrangements for use in-game.

Weather

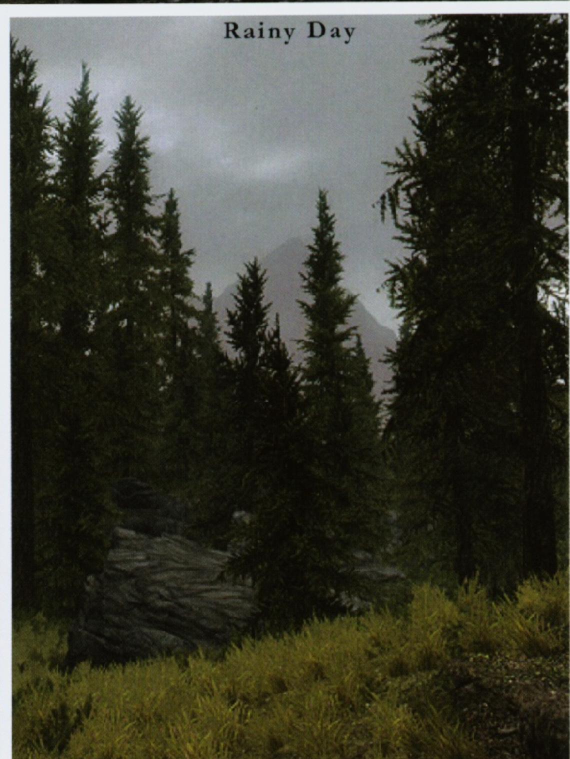
With Skyrim, we wanted to improve upon the fidelity and detail of our dynamic sky system, while bringing exterior vistas to new levels of stylized, mood-setting realism. To do so, we relied heavily upon extensive use of fog end-of-frame tone mapping.

Foggy Day

Clear Dawn



Rainy Day

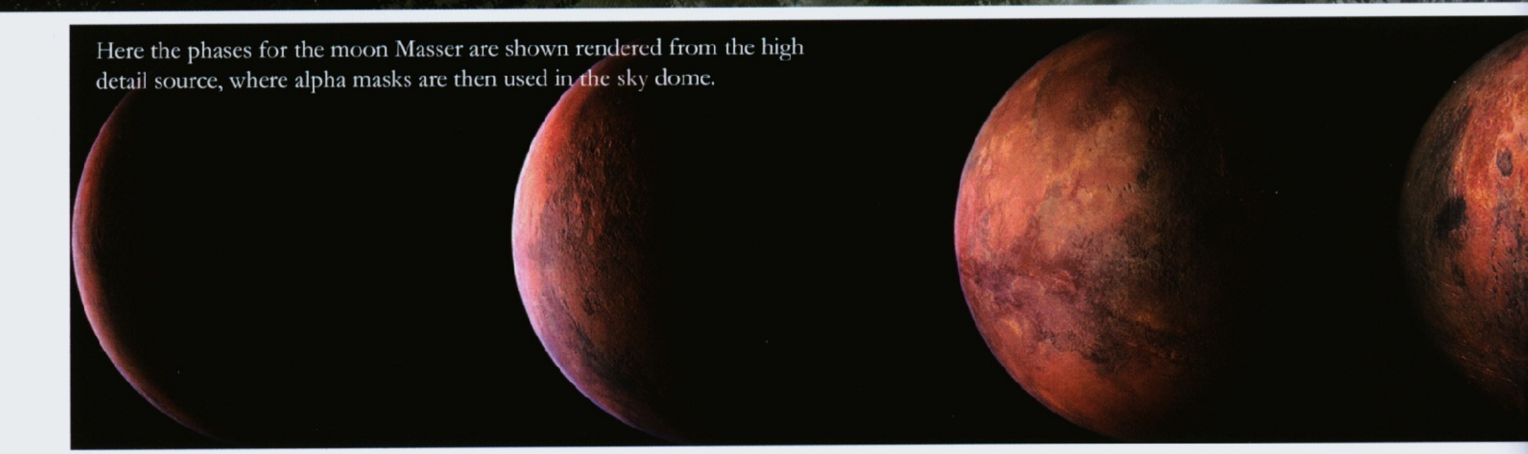


Snowy Day

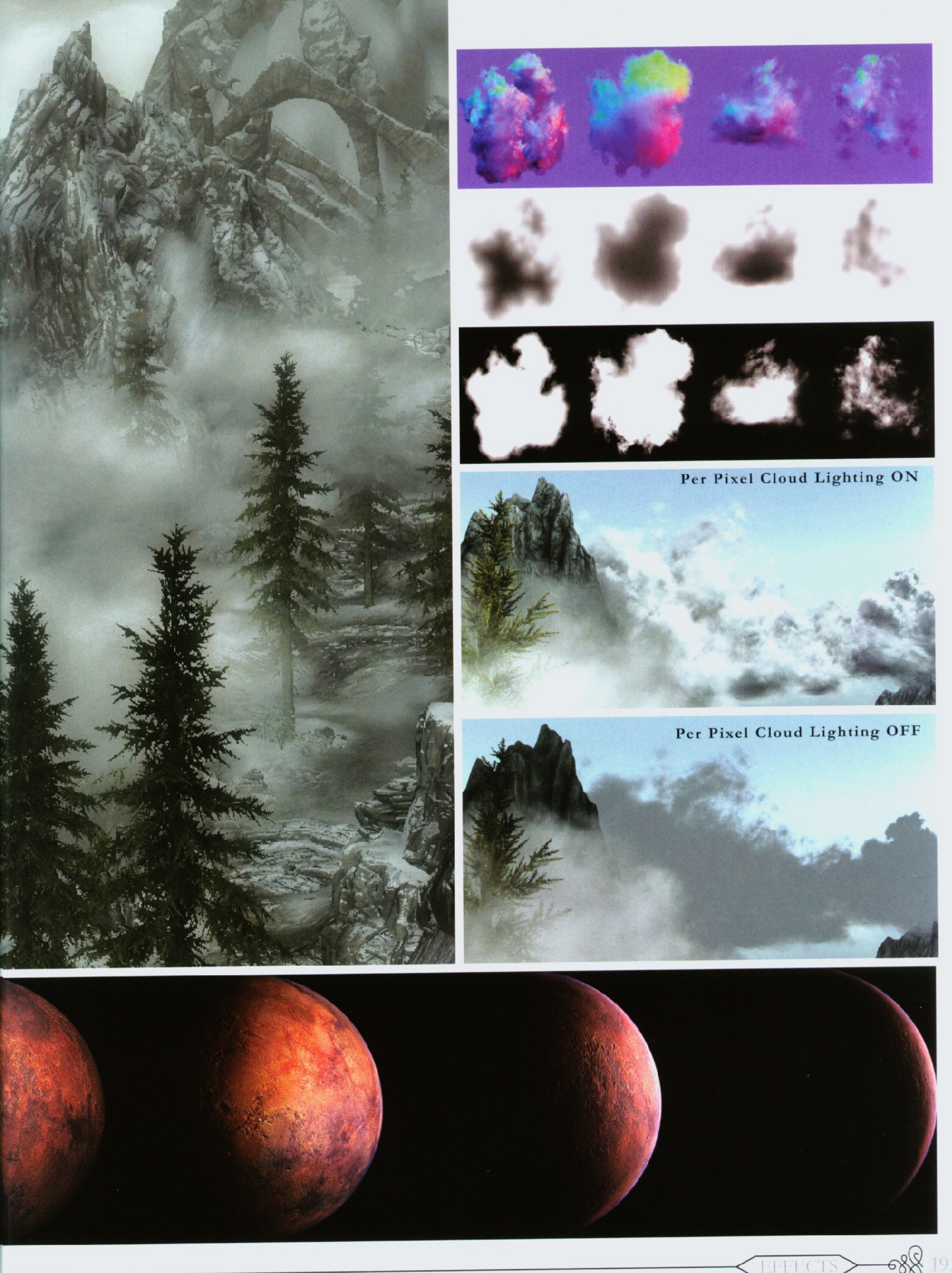


Clouds

To shroud the mountain peaks and forested valleys with rolling banks of fog and weather, a new technique for rendering per-pixel, normal-mapped cloud detail onto 2D surfaces was created. Various sub-texture lighting components can then be baked out into a piecemeal cloud kit for world building. Other sky elements received pre-render work as well.



Here the phases for the moon Masser are shown rendered from the high detail source, where alpha masks are then used in the sky dome.


Per Pixel Cloud Lighting ON
Per Pixel Cloud Lighting OFF

KEY ART

Early in production we established iconic images that help define the tone of the project. These high quality images are based off of in-game art. They are primarily used as marketing material to build excitement for the game. While the player can pick any type of character, we depict the player as a male Nord to best illustrate the tone of the game.











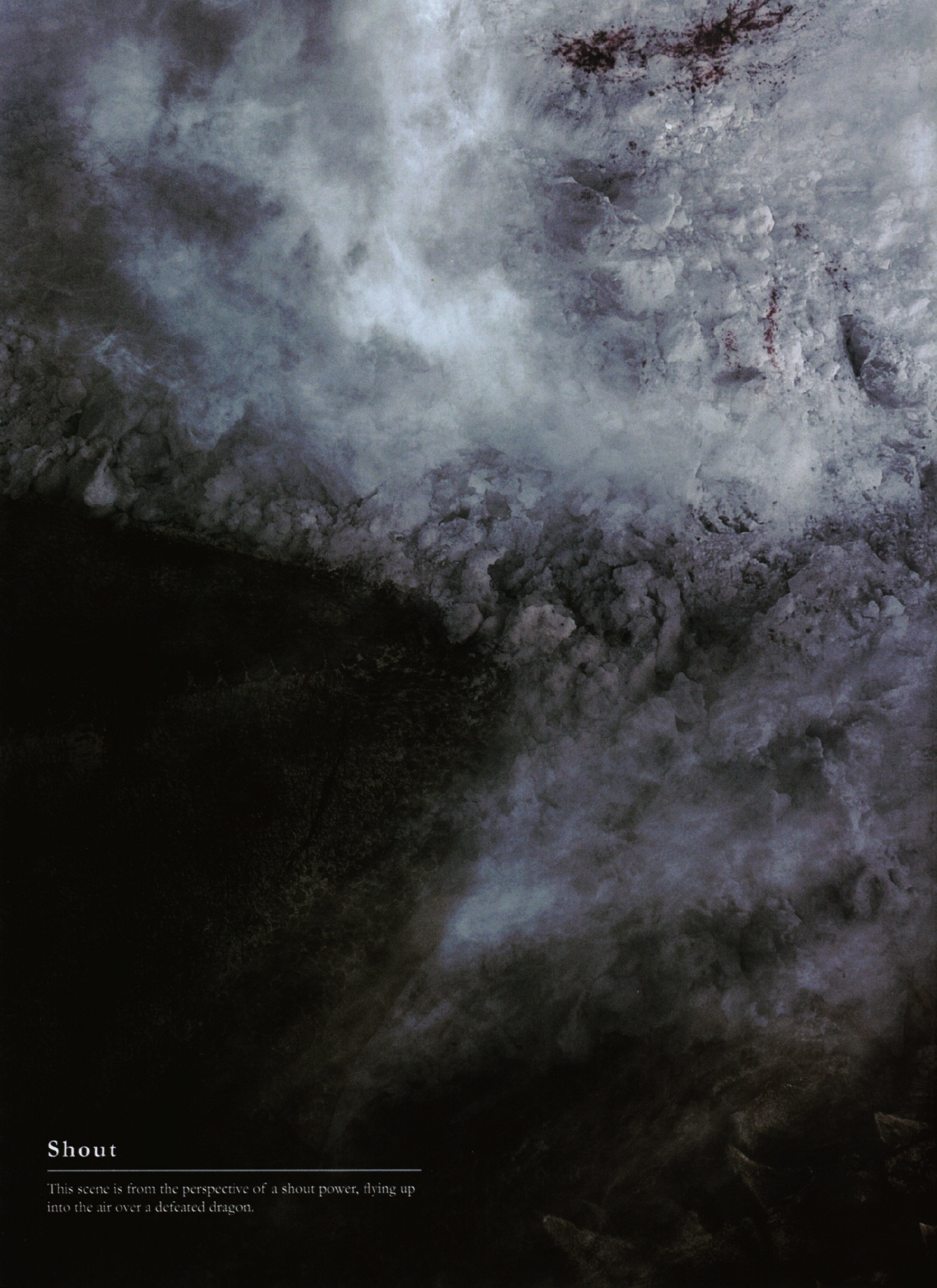
Dragonborn



Aerial Attack

For this scene we wanted to capture the struggle of battling a dragon without showing the dragon itself. The idea behind this painting is that the Dovahkiin is forming a shout as he draws his sword in a last attempt to defeat the dragon who is hinted at only in shadow.





Shout

This scene is from the perspective of a shout power, flying up into the air over a defeated dragon.





Landscape

This painting was made to convey the epic scale of the world of Skyrim.



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